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RESTLESS HUMAN HEARTS.

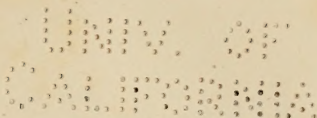


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# RESTLESS HUMAN HEARTS.

A Nobel.



BY

RICHARD JEFFERIES,

AUTHOR OF 'THE SCARLET SHAWL.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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# RESTLESS HUMAN HEARTS.

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## CHAPTER I.

ON strictly rational principles, Hotspur's ridicule of Glendower's high pretensions is sufficiently correct. 'When I was born,' says the magician and mystic,

'The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes.'

To which Hotspur, as pertly as a chambermaid, replies, that it was equally so when the kittens of that year came into existence. The advent of a comet may herald the birth of a cat as much as a Cæsar.

To trace any connection between the por-

tent in the sky and the earthly event is irrational and absurd. All this is true enough. But yet the lives of some among us do seem in some peculiar way to correspond with the singularities of nature. The coincidence may be merely accidental—but there it is; and a highly-wrought mind, dwelling upon its own aspirations and analysing its emotions, can hardly help feeling its individuality increased when it recognises these parallel circumstances. In their turn, the circumstances react upon the creature, and tend to produce a frame of mind strangely susceptible to mystic influences. It is thus that Renan, in the famous *Vie de Jésus*, accounts for what he describes as the delusions which occupied the mind of that central figure of history. The scenery of Judea—the romantic hills and plains, the seas and woods—heightened an originally poetical temperament, till a tension of the mind was produced in which it became capable of the most extraordinary efforts.

So many of us now dwell in an atmosphere of smoke and a scenery composed of brick

walls, that the existence of persons whose whole being vibrates to the subtle and invisible touch of Nature seems almost incredible, and certainly absurd. Yet such men and women are living at this day ; and well for the world and society that they do, for they act as air-holes, as breathing places, through the thick crust of artificialism, which weighs us down more and more year by year, and they let in a little of the divine light and ether, to purify the air and vivify the corrupting mass.

Laugh at them as much as ye please, ye habitués of the glass-and-iron, veneer-and-varnish palaces of our time. ‘Eat, drink, and be merry,’ as they did of old. In modern phrase, ‘Smoke, swill, and sneer.’ The temple in Leicester-square is the fit and appropriate dwelling for your god. Latterly the approach has been cleared to do it honour : fountains play, flowers grow, statues stand in symbolical attitudes. In the warm autumn atmosphere the Moorish pinnacles rise up, glittering with the evening sunlight, and the gaudy temple glows as its hour comes nigh.



The dead brown leaves, driven by the wind, penetrate even into stony London, and rustle along the pavement and whirl round in eddies at the corners of the street. They are a voice from the woods, an echo from the forgotten land, messengers from Nature, abiding still in her solitudes, warning wilful and blinded men to return ere it be too late. But listen ! The music rises, and the great hall is full of delicious sound. The dancers gather on the stage, and the flow of wit and joy and song begins. Go not to the Brocken—Walpurgis Night comes here every evening. The lights are gleaming in magic circles; the beauteous witches are floating round. Let us go in and be happy. Who would care to stray on the shore alone, watching the sunset over the waves and the advent of the first lone silvery star? They would sneer at us. The odour of gas is better than the fresh and briny breeze. Yet the delight in the artificial is not altogether an acquired taste only. How is it, else, that the freshest and purest heart, beating warmly with the generous blood of

youth, longs so eagerly for the feverish excitements of society?

‘O, isn’t it lovely?’ cried impetuous Heloise, settling herself upon her seat in a box in the Haymarket, with a radiant smile upon her face. ‘But only think, we are late: the first act is begun.’

‘Late!’ said Louis, sneering as usual. ‘It is ten minutes past eight. What fools we must look! There are only two other boxes occupied, and one of those is full of children. The *cognoscenti* will take us for paid applauders; we come so regularly and so soon.’

‘Paid applauders! What do you mean?’ asked Heloise, never taking her gaze from the stage.

‘The success of a piece, my dear, depends upon the number of boxes taken. When the pit people see the boxes full, they say, “O, this must be good—see, *they* are here!” Therefore the manager sends his superfluous actors into the empty boxes. Have I made it clear to you, my dear child?’

But she was absorbed in the drama, and

did not hear his mocking tone. Louis looked at her fixedly for a moment or two, with his mouth a little open—much as a country rustic might stare at a real live duke ; then he drew back somewhat, and, turning away from the stage, began to read the latest edition of his evening paper. He soon tired of that.

This is the age of verbiage. Everything must be so long and spun out. No matter how clever a novel may be, the publishers will not issue it unless it will extend to six or seven hundred printed pages. The same plot and characters condensed into two hundred and fifty would be interesting, even exciting; but drawn out to this melancholy length, it is simply a bore. It is equally so with scientific books, and works that pretend to some amount of solidity. They must all be bulky, or they may remain in the author's desk, unpublished and unread. Now it takes a whole life to invent, and afterwards elaborate and bring to a shapely form, one single new idea. Take, for instance, any of the great authors. Look at Goethe. It is all very well



to talk about *Wilhelm Meister* and the *Autobiography*, and the rest—books which our grandfathers read—but the one idea by which Goethe became a living personality to the multitude was his creation of *Faust*, and *Faust* took him a lifetime to write—nay, it was not finished when he died, for he corrected it every year. If, then, such a genius as Goethe could only produce one idea in a lifetime, it may be safely taken for granted that the common run of compilers cannot put more than one in each of their works. What an enormous amount of verbiage, then, must there be in a book of a thousand pages! Say that it took one hundred pages to give a fair description of the one original thought which prompted the author to commence, then there remain nine hundred pages, of thirty lines a page, and seven words a line, giving a total of one hundred and eighty-nine thousand waste words. *Faust*, which took a great genius, is not a long book either. The typical writer of our time, Charles Dickens, is the very impersonation of this verbiage and flow of

words. His books, of five hundred closely-printed pages, in small type and double columns, are standing marvels of word-accumulations. Setting aside the cleverness of the author, what is it but one ceaseless flow of sentences? It is the newspaper correspondent spun out, and bound in three volumes. The competition is to pile up the greatest heaps and pyramids of words. So it is with our leaders of politics: the post can only be held by men who can talk, talk—talk, in good old homely phrase, ‘a horse’s head off.’ That is the qualification for a statesman: neither talents, nor genius, nor research, but ‘jaw.’

Louis got tired of his paper. Yet the *Pall Mall* is an honourable exception to the vast mass of verbiage poured out daily, almost hourly, by the metropolitan press. Here, at least, they condense the news, however dull and uninteresting it may be. But even here they are obliged, by custom, by the monstrous appetite for words, to print columns upon columns utterly idea-less, to coin a phrase. As for the leading daily paper, its

contents every morning are equal in extent to a three-volume novel.

Louis yawned, and, leaning back against the side of the box, languidly fixed his eyes upon the profile of Heloise. The man could not make her out, nor himself out either. He was puzzled. He could not understand himself; and it made him irritable. He was irritable enough by nature, without this additional impetus. She worried him. He wished her out of sight every hour, and yet he was always studying her. They had been married about six weeks.

If he had been left to himself, he would have been on the Continent at that moment—it was just his favourite time. Not that he would have been anywhere in the usual and well-beaten track. It would not have been the Spa, or the roulette-table, or any of the other excuses for the congregation of human beings, that would have attracted him. He would have been in Antwerp. Did you ever see the picture of the interior of Antwerp Cathedral painted by a certain famous artist,

and now in a certain well-known gallery not far from Landseer's dirty lions? This picture is not much noticed; there is never any crowd about it. Yet it has a beauty which is peculiarly its own. The æsthetic nature of the artist, the intense sensual spirituality of his soul, live in this work. It is a contradiction in terms; but it is a fact that there is such a thing as sensual spirituality. Here you may see it. The long dim arches of the cathedral, solemn and still, are filled with an undefined blue mist. You cannot see this blue mist if you look straight at it, or even if you think of it, or search for it. But it grows out of the canvas as the gaze rests upon it; it steals out from the dark places, and clouds the outlines of the pillars till the roof of the building floats upon azure colour. The curve of the arch, the regularity of the pillars, the beauty of the architecture, are spiritual. This colour is sensual. The two together form what can only be called a sensual spiritualism; which is a union of the beauty perceived by the chaste and some-

what sad mind and of the beauty which fascinates the eye. What a city must Antwerp be when the blue of heaven thus comes down and dwells in the holy places, as the Shechinah, the 'cloud,' rested upon the ark behind the curtains of the Tabernacle! A city pure and morally lovely thus to be honoured by the celestial ether!

Louis would laugh his horrid grating laugh, if he could read this. He had other ideas of Antwerp. He was aware of a certain street of palaces and temples, yea, verily, temples, devoted to the worship of a goddess, nameless now, but highly spoken of by those of olden time. An infamous place—infamous far and near—this street. Do not misjudge Louis so far as to think that he debased himself personally. But it was a congenial atmosphere. Men were to be met there who could not be seen elsewhere; and these men were—what? They deserve a chapter to themselves. If time allows, they shall have it. They are foremost in the van of progress without faith—progress without moral prin-



ciple. Alison, the voluminous (I was about to say the *great*) historian, describes Napoleon I. as answering to the Christian's idea of the devil, *i.e.* supreme intellect without moral principle. These men are not Napoleons, but they influence the world collectively, and almost as much as he did. Yet they have no names, no cohesion—they are wandering individuals.

It was these men whose society Louis had loved. He was not quite certain whether he loved it still or not. But he called to mind the fact, that had it not been for Heloise he would have been among them at that hour. It was his time: when the nuts began to harden he took his way thither. He dwelt in memory upon the scenes he had witnessed, the *splendid* talk he had heard there; the splendid enchanting talk—so grand, so ignoble, so aspiring, yet so base and mean, but in all things novel, new, exciting! It was a San Francisco saloon minus the inevitable revolver. Louis was a coward; all advanced men are—that is, advanced men of

*his* order. There are reasons for that, too. He dwelt still upon those scenes; they passed before his mind's eye. This was an evil thing for Heloise.

She did not disturb his billiards, or his club-dinner, or his card-party, or his wine, because he had no habits of that kind. She simply upset him from beginning to end. There was no personal inconvenience, no crossing of his purpose—for he had no purpose, no wilful interference with his pet pursuits, no demands upon his time. He recognised it at last. He discovered what it was. It was simply her presence that ruffled him. He could not sleep in self-contemplation while she was near; he could not close his eyes surrounded with troops of old and familiar ideas; her presence jarred, some how, upon him. The delicate sensitiveness of his inner being was continually irritated; like the gold leaf of an electrometer, his repose was perpetually disturbed by the influence that irradiated from her. He had an ever-increasing desire to be alone, and yet he could not leave

her side. He groaned under the infliction of having to wait upon her, and yet he watched her slightest wish, and hastened to forestall it. He chafed, and yet he tried to persuade himself that he was calm—so calm, that he had settled down to a rationally happy existence.

He had not been to these theatres for ten years. The whole thing was familiar, and yet strange. Everything seemed the same; but he had changed. The glitter was gone; the charm had fled; the velvet had faded; the gilding was tarnished; the flaring gas was dim. It was equally faded and tarnished and dim ten years ago; but his mind was fresh then, his eye uncritical, his senses joying in light and colour and brilliance. The brightness and beauty of the thing was in his own soul, and he poured it out upon the theatre, and lit it up with the light of his own abundant spirit. But now the stage was wood, and the drama itself mere words without meaning—hollow sounds only; his own heart, in fact, was hollow and empty. He did not reason all this out, but the sense and feeling

of it made him irritable. Heloise had brought him back into desert places; places he had reaped and garnered beforehand, and now they were barren and desolate. He had no complaint to make, and yet he was dissatisfied.





## CHAPTER II.

It was only a little way out of the dusty highway, and yet it was a lovely spot. The road there was flat, and the scene tame and dull. There was an odour of stale beer and coarse tobacco, a stable-like smell, at the entrance to the village, which came from a low whitewashed public-house, where the teams stopped for refreshment. The carters drank from a great quart cup, and the horses drank a green unwholesome-looking liquor stagnating in a trough, and called by courtesy water, as the viler beverage was called beer, and each was about as muddy and thick as the other. Near the horse-trough, on one side, was a heap of manure, strewn with eggshells and stumps of decaying cabbages and pea-pods, tainting the air still further; and on the other, a rude bench—a plank unplanned,



rough from the saw, supported on two unhewn logs. The end of the house faced the road, and the thatch could be easily touched by a man on horseback. There was one small lattice-window, with three broken panes at this end, close under the roof, and in this window was a card with the inscription, 'Good Ginger-beer sold here,' with a couple of blacking-bottles by way of illustration; for the spruce glass bottles of 'aerated-waters' manufacturers had not penetrated so far as this yet. This end of the house had a yellowish unhealthy look; the whitewash was discoloured with age and the weather. The place was overshadowed with a great horse-chestnut-tree, whose brown-and-yellow leaves and the prickly cases of its fruit strewn the ground. It was a noble tree, utterly inappropriate to such a place; the very contrast, in its glorious growth and beautiful proportions, to the coarse rudeness of the house, and the people who stayed there beneath its shade. In the spring, when the clusters of blossom hung upon each bough till the whole tree looked like a splendid

candelabra—each blossom a lamp—the contrast was almost painful. It seemed as if the jests and the oaths, and the rank smell of beer and horses, must pollute it; but, utterly unconscious of the foulness surrounding it, the tree grew and flourished in calm splendour, in conscious superiority, unmoved. ‘I am not of thine order. I do not sneer at or condemn thee and such as thee, thou rude and coarse boor at my foot; but I soar upwards, and I put forth things of beauty, and I rejoice in the sun and the wind and the rain, and the sight of the sky above me, and of the stars by night. Thus absorbed I neither see, nor hear, nor am conscious of the human miasma beneath me. A time shall come—only once perhaps in my whole lifetime—when a traveller, journeying hither, and sore bruised in spirit, but noble at heart, shall gaze upon me and my flower-lamps, and, strengthened thereby, yield no more to the depressing influence of the dusty ways of life, but hold on his road with quickened step, seeking the true and the beautiful.’

The muddy beer dulled their hearing, and they never guessed that the tree was thus speaking. This was the Sun Inn, at Avon-bourne. On the blue ground of the sign there was painted a round human face, with goggling eyes and open mouth, and surrounded with sharp rays all in brightest yellow. This represented the sun—the wondrous orb of day, theme of the poets, supporter of life, the god Ra of the Egyptians, thus insulted and brought down to the level of the minds of the carters and ploughmen, who hailed it as the assurance of beer. They have taught us from our youth up to despise the idolaters of the bygone ages. We spit upon them, and cry, ‘Poor wretches, miserable creatures!’ But see here. Reflect upon the grandeur and majesty of the sun, the king of heaven, the centre upon which all earthly life depends, the giver of heat and light—light, the noblest of all material things; is not the sun the very highest triumph of the Creator’s art—the *chef-d’œuvre* of Heaven? Is it not an ever-present witness to the inscrutable God? And

degraded to an alehouse sign, represented in such rude conventional style as the very aborigines of America, the most uncultivated savages, could easily surpass! The carters and the ploughmen fling stones at it, and guffaw as a flint strikes the flat nose, or open mouth, or glaring insane eyes. Consider: are they not more ignorant than the idolaters who knelt to the sun as the visible sign of God in the ages long ago? Have they a right to cast a sneer upon the Magi—a right to repeat Sunday anathemas upon the idolaters?

There were a few houses right and left of this inn. They do not concern us. But there was a lane in front of the Sun, and this lane led to the beautiful and lovely spot where Heloise was born. Who, sojourning an hour at that inn, under the shade of the chestnut-tree, would have suspected it?—for though the downs were near they appeared brown and parched, nothing lovely.

Winding and turning, the lane came down to the bourne. The swallows ga-

thered thickly in the osier beds at this time. The tall yellow rods of willow were black with the folded wings of the birds of summer, as they lit down upon them in countless crowds, and, pruning their feathers, chattered incessantly of the voyage they soon must take. How busy those little brains must be! how those little minds must work, and try to think of this and that! how the tiny bills open and shut perpetually as they pour their ideas out in a ceaseless stream of eloquence! O, for a shorthand reporter who understood the language of birds! what a newspaper that would be which he could write! Wherever the beggars find an open door and generous hearts ready to give, there they set up a mark upon the wall that the next passer-by may know he is sure of his reception. The fowls of the air do likewise; only we cannot see their marks. They gather where the human inhabitants are kindly-hearted. Those who live in the country know that there are wide tracts where birds are rarely seen, even woods unpeopled with songsters; and there



are spots where they crowd together, and in one single orchard specimens of almost the whole tribe can be found. Why is this? There is some secret invisible chord of sympathy. Pierce Lestrangle said the birds came about his home because he never offended the fairies. This was Heloise's father. It was his poetical way of expressing the fact that he lived in accord with nature. Wherever men swear and fight, wherever houses are unnaturally crowded together, and an unnatural course of living is followed, almost everywhere where brick and mortar come, from thence the fairies fly away never to return. But Pierce would have no lonely dell or woody nook of his land defiled that he might make 'filthy lucre.' Therefore the birds gathered about that place. He would not have the swallows' nests disturbed under his eaves; no nest was ever taken in his precincts. The great thrush—the missel-thrush—wildest and fiercest of all its class, untamable, unsociable, had built for twenty years every spring in the yew-tree just in

front of the breakfast-parlour window. That tree was his inheritance. The thrush of that day had inherited it from his father, and he again from his grandfather—three generations. Very jealous the thrush was, too, of his domain; no other bird dared build in that tree, no other dared even perch upon the branches, if he, the lord and master, was there. The cooing of the wild doves was heard the whole day long in the great chestnut-trees at the lower end of the garden. The starlings marched to and fro upon the lawn; the blackbird washed himself in the fountain before the door, fearless, unhesitatingly. On the wall of the garden the peacock, slowly and stately, stepped up and down, spreading abroad his wealth of colour. The rabbits had ventured in and burrowed under the rhododendrons; they peeped forth in the evening, in the dusk, frisking their white tails in joy of life. The goldfinches sang in the morning on the apple-trees—trees which grew almost under Pierce's window. 'I could not be happy,' he said, 'unless I heard the finches

sing when I wake.' He was an old man, too, of seventy, and very gray; yet such was his pleasure in living creatures. The butterflies were always in that garden; the humming-bird moths came to the geraniums; the hum of the bees rose and fell perpetually as the tiny insects flew hurriedly by; the restless wasps were hard at work on the plums now—for Pierce had fruit-trees all round the walls of his garden, in the centre of which was a wide lawn, and in the centre of that a vast thicket of rhododendrons and laurel, where the rabbits hid themselves. The orchard branched out at one side, and at the very end of the lawn the bourne, the stream flowing towards the Avon, wound along. A treacherous bank it was, for the water-rats, undisturbed, had bored it with innumerable tunnels—utterly undisturbed, let alone to do as they pleased. Bold and timid too they were. A movement, a wave of the hand, the slightest sound, and splash they had dived out of sight. But remain still and silent, and in a moment or two a brown head peeped

out, a black eye twinkled; out came the miniature beaver, and, seating himself upon his hinder part, washed his face with his tiny paws. The stream ran deep and strong here, under this bank towards the lawn, so deep that the eye could not penetrate its depth; but out yonder, half-way across to the other side, one could see the waving weeds, slowly vibrating along their length to the motion of the water. Here the still patient pike lay motionless for hours, awaiting his prey—the roach, who restlessly swam to and fro in the black pool under the lawn bank, seen occasionally as they turned sideways and showed their white glancing under part. Thence it shallowed till the mud appeared, where the marks of the moor-hen's foot could be traced, and the flags grew green in the spring with yellow flowers; the iris, now brown and withered, rustling in the breeze. There, too, grew the tall reeds, with their graceful flower-bunches; and beyond these the bank rose high, and over it was a belt of impervious fir-trees and pines, scenting the air with their exuding

gum, and bearing cones high up towards the topmost branches.

This was Pierce's garden—or rather this is a dim outline of it; for it contained inexhaustible riches of this kind. The downs rose up a short distance beyond the bourne—downs upon whose slopes you might lie, and listen to the whistling of the breezes through the benets, till all thought of the world and its contentions passed out of the mind. The old house rambled about, like Pierce's mind, and yet was substantial and large, and even stately after its way. These had been abbey lands, and one small portion of the abbey itself remained, and was built upon and all round by those who erected the mansion. This was the breakfast-parlour, Pierce's favourite room, with the great yew-tree shadowing its mullioned window, and the walls wainscoted, and the furniture of oak, fantastically carved, as no man carves in this our day: at once grim, grotesque, and artistic, there are none who can grave in such guise now. Somewhat sombre was this room; there was an air of



slumberous age about it. Here he had brought some of the treasures from the old abbey library. There was the ponderous chartulary, yellow with age, lying, of all places, upon the sideboard ; and close by it curious folios upon astrology, and the rare and precious early tomes of Shakespeare ; these all scattered about, as novels and such works are in ordinary rooms. He said that he liked this free confusion better than the formal stateliness of a library. His guests were free to open and to read a few lines just as they pleased, or to entirely pass the treasures by ; there was no ceremonious unlocking of cases, no careful handling, no show. The other window of the room, which looked out upon the orchard, and by which there ran a path, he had filled with ancient glass, taken from a chapel in the old abbey. The central figure of the window, in bright and yet mellow colour, was a cardinal blessing with the two uplifted fingers and the extended thumb of the Roman Church. Near by were saints and angels, with faces familiar as those of the carters and ploughboys—

homely and yet lifelike; portraits of men whom the ancient artist had known, and whom he had crowned in the Heaven of his fancy. This was not one design; it was composed of pieces from several windows—all that had been preserved—arranged with no view except to have the most brilliant colours, such as the cardinal's hat, in the centre. The lands were purchased in Queen Elizabeth's time from one of King Henry VIII.'s favourites, who had had them almost a free gift when that monarch dissolved the monasteries. Pierce's ancestor of that day had been a judge, and he was the grandest of the family; there had been none with any worldly ambition since. They had one and all refused to be made more than magistrates; one and all they had kept out of politics; one and all they had farmed a good share of the estates themselves. These were not large, but large enough to place them in the position of country gentlemen. Pierce more than all the rest lived in seclusion, yet spent the whole of his income. True, that income was hardly more than half what

he could rightfully have claimed. He had surrendered the other portion to his younger brother, in order that he might remain near him. Philip lived barely a bowshot distant, in a house known as the Vicarage; for Pierce was the lay impropriator, and took the great tithes. This was a more modern mansion, square and compact. A broad paved footpath ran straight from one house to the other; half-way it was parted with a door arched in the wall; beyond this was another paved footpath, running at right angles, and then a second door opening into Philip's garden. These doors were never locked, but they were there. The paved footpath running at right angles went down the hill somewhat to the church where Philip officiated, whose low tower was hidden by the chestnut-trees.

Why was it that the barns of the place were always full? Why was it that the sun seemed ever to shine here, and even the storm, when it came, was altogether lovely? For the coloured bow gleamed out from the

angry cloud, and rested its ethereal arch—the portal of heaven—upon the everlasting hills, and smiling peace was there again. Nature dealt lovingly with the old man Pierce—most lovingly of all in giving him Heloise.

He had married in his youth; what came of that does not matter in this place. He had married again in his middle age—married a French lady too, above all things, as the neighbours sneered; and what came of that was Heloise. The mother was long dead. It had been left to Pierce to watch the peach ripen, to see the bloom gather upon the rind, and the delicate tints and velvety softness grow to surpassing beauty.

She was hardly strong enough even now to carry him the abbey chartulary from the shelf to his chair: a delicate slight girl, not tall, and yet not short; delicate as the richest exotic, and yet all impulse, all nervous excitement. Perfectly healthy, the doctor said—perfectly healthy; but beware how she was

shocked. As long as she was happy she would flourish; but the winter of sorrow, if such should come, would most assuredly kill her. He had kept that winter away as yet. Her bird-like movements had never been fettered with the dull clog of misery. She danced about the house from morning till night; she rode, she sang, she played, happy as the day was long. The long curling black hair was rarely confined with band or ribbon; it flowed freely upon her shoulders in luxuriant wilfulness, and clung around her neck in ringlets. The long, long eyelashes drooped upon her cheek, half-hiding the eye, even when wide open. They were large eyes—large and liquid—of the deepest azure blue. The eyebrows were narrow, black, and well marked, not too arched; the complexion dazzlingly white—white as the driven snow—with the faintest flush of colour, like a blush rose, in the cheek. But the mouth—who shall describe the mouth? Mobile and ever-changing, its expression never fixed, what artist could ever hope to transfer those lips to the canvas? It

pouted, and it looked lovely; it smiled, and enchanted; there was a flash of momentary anger, and it bewitched you. Her soul ever hovered near her lips.

‘ Sweet Helen makes me immortal with a kiss ;  
Her lips draw forth my soul : see where it flies.’

Pierce in his inmost communings ever thought of her as Psyche; but she was too lively for the conventional conception of Psyche—never still; ever in motion; always eager for change and excitement. Other people remarked this, and said slightly that it was a sign of her French extraction. One thing only ever kept her still—one thought only ever made her silent and reflective; it was religion. She could not have told you why, but the feeling of religion was ingrained in her very inmost being. It was a peculiar religion, it is true; an æsthetic longing rather than a tangible realisation. It had no existence apart from colour and light and joy. So she was rarely seen at church; it was too cold and damp and dim and dull there. It was all stone—dead.



Other people said this, too, was the result of her French extraction. As the tree, so the fruit; as the mother was Roman Catholic, the child would not go to a Protestant church. This was harsh and untrue; she had been carefully bred up in the Protestant faith. It was not that; it was the lack of life at the church. There was no sunshine in it, no colour, no light. Heloise's heart was full of aspirings—after she knew not what, but which she deemed were sacred hopes. She sat under the old chestnut-trees, watching the shadows dancing, and let these feelings have their way. She climbed up the steep-sided downs, and, choosing a hollow sheltered from the wind, lay down upon the soft thymy turf, while the bees flew overhead and the lark sang high above her, and dreamt day-dreams, not of heaven, but of something—she knew not what; of a state of existence all and every hour of which should be light and joy and life. It was one of her fancies, this lying on the broad earth, with her ear close to the ground, that she could feel the heart of the

world throb slowly far underneath. Pierce, living himself among the classics, desired that she should share his pleasures, and had put English translations of them into her hands; and it was perhaps from these, from old Diogenes Laertius or Plato, that these fancies had their birth; for some of these old philosophers taught that the world collectively was in itself a vast animal or creature, with heart and pulse and soul. In the silence of the hills she could hear this great heart throb. She was on these hills often in the very early morning, riding her pony, and watching the light and shadow as the sun rose over the clouds of mist. Pierce encouraged her in this; the air did her good. It was the air, the physicians said, which made her, though so delicate, yet so healthy, so to say, so full of life. But the evening was her favourite time, when the sunset flamed in the west, one gorgeous mass of gold and crimson and brilliant hues. She would slowly ride about till the first planet shone forth, and then homeward with a gentle and chastened feeling, sending up, it might be, from her

heart a prayer to the Heaven she had been taught to believe in.

Looking at her from our distance, calmly and critically, the question arises, Was she or was she not a pagan?

It was a religion that mingled with every hour of her daily life—no matter of one hour every week, but an ever-present reality. Once more, this was Heloise's home, these were the influences under which she grew up. She had seen nothing of life, nothing of society. Her time had been passed in this 'dull country house.' What wonder that she entered so eagerly into the excitement of the theatre? She was so absorbed with the rapid changes of the six weeks they had been married, she never even suspected Louis of sneering. She did not detect the faint inflection of his tone of voice; she was unconscious of his mockery. Louis, remember, was outwardly attentive and considerate to a fault. She was too excited for even her sensitive nature to as yet feel the jar—to recognise the barely-perceptible shadow which had already fallen across her path.

Sweet Heloise—married but six weeks—even her best and sweetest temper was of no avail. Unseen, the gold of the wedding-ring was tarnishing already.





### CHAPTER III.

A FATALIST, as all close observers of Nature and all *intense* minds are, Pierce traced the loss of Heloise to that first unfortunate marriage of his. This was why he had kept her in such strict seclusion. He argued with himself—told himself that it was for her health ; it was better that she should not be excited ; in his heart of hearts he well knew that he dreaded her entrance into society, lest she should marry, and leave him. He could not contemplate the possibility of so lovely a creature passing unnoticed amidst the crowd ; she would be sure to be snatched away from him, and he should be left alone. Therefore he had kept her in the country, tortured at times with the fear lest he was doing her an injustice, doubting whether, in his selfishness, he was not injuring her, whom he loved above

all. But he could not bring himself to part with her, not even for three months. It would have been different, he said, if she had pined for change, if she had panted for the legitimate pleasures and amusements of youth. But Heloise, so impetuous and so fond of motion, never showed the least inclination to leave him, never asked to go out into the world. She was contented, happy ; and he was only too glad that she should be so. Now he traced events back to their beginning, and saw, or thought he saw, that the very precautions he had taken to secure her to himself had resulted in precisely the opposite manner to what he had hoped and intended. It was fate.

Not the Fate conceived of by the ancients—the overwhelming Necessity, which could not be withstood, even by the gods; but to which they, too, must succumb. Even in our modern Christian and civilised, let us add sceptical, time, such a Necessity is partly acknowledged. For the great Founder of the Christian religion, in the agony of the moment,



cried out that if possible the supreme hour of torture might be averted. But no; not even for Him could the irresistible march of events be stayed! It was not the Fate that drove the hero of Sophocles' saddest drama to kill his father, and wed his mother in mental blindness. Nor did Pierce recognise the so-called 'Providence' which in our modern tongue is the synonym of the 'destiny' and the 'fate' of the olden times. What he meant by fate was the singular and unexpected concatenation of circumstances which human ingenuity could not foresee. Cæsar Borgia said that he had foreseen the death of his father, he had calculated on that; he had foreseen the animosity of the cardinals, and had calculated the required amount of counter-action; he had foreseen that the troops would desert him. He had taken measures to overcome all these difficulties. But he had *not* foreseen that he should be ill himself, and incapable of action. That ruined him. They show a tower in a city of the west of England, and they call it a 'Folly,' because it was built by

a man to shield his only son and heir from the death, by bite of an adder, which was foretold by the astrologers. The boy was kept in the tower night and day, and the father rejoiced, and cried, 'He is safe.' But in the course of time the servants took in some fagots of wood for fuel, and in those fagots was an adder, which crept out and stung the lad. Therefore they call it a 'Folly,' as showing that human wisdom is weak and powerless to control the great Unknown.

Pierce had taught Heloise to find pleasures and joys where girls of her age would usually see nothing but dulness and inanity. He had shown her heart-stirring things in the woods, the downs, the sky, and in the very grass under her feet. For he said, 'If she joys in these, she will never leave me; she will never hanker after the artificial.' He had built up a tower around her to bind her in and secure her, and now he found it a 'folly.'

It was his first marriage. It came up even at this distance of time, and flung itself in his teeth. Yet there was nothing criminal in it

either; nothing even inappropriate, as far as man could see; they were fairly matched, to all appearance: but it was a mistake. In the sight of the irresistible laws which govern the universe, a mistake is as fruitful of evil effects as the greatest of all crimes. Out of that marriage Louis came to Avonbourne. Yet how he came seemed wrapped in a dense mist of obscurity. Pierce never could see the reason as to why and wherefore. He came out of a cloud. Nothing very obscure either, looking at it in a commonplace way. Carlotta came, and with her her husband and Louis.

Carlotta, Pierce's eldest daughter, by his first wife. But why should she come that spring to visit her old home? The answer is simple enough. It may sound strange, but this man, her father, only knew her features from a miniature painted ten years ago. He had not seen her since her childhood. She had passed from his sphere as a girl—a wilful, pettish, ambitious, artificial creature. Pierce's garden was not for her. She found friends easily with her relations; they brought her

up. And this was how it was. She never came back—not once in full five-and-twenty years. For a whole quarter of a century he never saw her face. She left him at fifteen, she came back at forty—came back, unexpected, unannounced, one lovely evening in spring. With her Louis *and* her husband, or her husband *and* Louis—which you please. She had married early, and wondrously well, as every one said she would. At twenty she went to the altar with one whom Mammon favoured as a man ‘after his own heart.’ A bullionist, a discounteer of bills, in Lombard-street; on the Continent, a raiser of loans for tottering governments, a master in their secret councils. Personally a man of polished steel. Not brazen, or loud, or oily, or canting, nor ‘gentlemanly’ only; but of polished steel. A light spare form, well proportioned; a handsome face, only expressionless; a low voice, but a voice which you could hear at double the distance of the hissing thick sounds which issue from the great majority of throats; polished and hard—such was

Horton Knoyle of Knoyle. He was no vulgar speculator on the Exchange, no fortune-hunter, but a prince—a prince by reason of his power, a prince by reason of his aristocratic position. Carlotta, in a single step, rose to a sphere where she could not see Pierce. He passed away entirely. Ambassadors, dukes, princes of the blood, sovereigns—these were her guests, these her hosts, now. The garden at Avonbourne sank into the ground and was hidden. After her marriage her portrait was painted in oil by a famous artist; from this a miniature was taken, and sent to Pierce by the aunt who had brought her up, who had launched her into ‘society,’ as a sort of triumph. It represented Carlotta in full dress, wearing her diamonds—the Knoyle diamonds. Pierce was not asked to the wedding. The country gentry poured in to congratulate him; he received them with exquisite politeness, but he was silent. They saw they should get no *entrée* into a higher class through him, and the subject dropped. Carlotta passed out of sight. Now and then

they saw in the papers that such and such a grand reception had been held by Lady Knoyle; for she was a peeress in her own right now. Horton refused the minister's offer for himself, but, as the papers said, gracefully placed the coronet upon his consort's head. If any man could have seen into his heart as he did so! Excepting these notices there was an utter blank between the parent and the daughter.

Till all at once she and Knoyle and Louis came to Avonbourne in the still May eve—in early May, before the June roses had shown their opening buds. Without a note of warning, without a letter giving notice of their approach—as if Bourne Manor was an hotel—superciliously they came. Till the carriage stopped at the hall-door no one knew of their coming. Pierce and Heloise were out riding at the hour. They entered; Carlotta took her old rooms; they unpacked their luggage, sent the horses to the stable, ordered refreshment, and calmly awaited the return of their host. Pierce had often pictured to



himself a meeting with his long-lost daughter; he felt that his limbs would tremble when he did see her at last. Now she had come, he met her, kissed her, talked to her as if she had been the most ordinary visitor. He expressed no surprise at their coming—he made them welcome. He was far too highly-bred to show the least resentment at the cool supercilious manner in which he had been treated. He accompanied Horton that very evening to the famous trout-preserve on the estate, producing the fishing-tackle as if he had been his son-in-law's gamekeeper. He showed Horton how to fish. This man of steel had been advised to try trout-fishing as a relief to the mind! It was the first time he had ever held a rod. This was ostensibly the reason of their arrival: Horton was overworked—wanted rest, the physicians said, and prescribed him country air and fishing. Horton smiled, and did as they bid. But there was fishing enough elsewhere—why Avonbourne was chosen was Carlotta's affair. Also trout-fishing was not the cause of Louis

accompanying them. And Heloise all this time? Heloise was never tired of watching her half-sister. She would gaze at her almost for hours at a time. She could not understand her; she was a creature so totally distinct from aught she had ever imagined or seen. Carlotta was an enigma to her.

Oddly enough, Pierce and Louis became great friends—rather let us say great talkers together. Perhaps it was the extreme contrast between their habits of thought. In their mode of life they had been the antipodes of each other. Each in his peculiar way and in his own particular walk had been a great observer. Only Pierce observed the workings of the laws of God with a reverential feeling; Louis had watched the ways of men with ever-increasing scepticism. Pierce knew Nature; Louis knew man. There was much that was utterly repulsive to Pierce in Louis' expressions, in his tone, his whole style of life. But the old man made allowances for the different calibre of his guest. He tried to imagine himself in the other's place, with

completely opposite tastes, inclinations; under a widely-varying chain of circumstances; exposed to influences which he had never felt the power of. He subtracted all the dross, and threw it on one side, and believed that there still remained no little ore at the bottom. It was Pierce's own generous and noble way of estimating men.

There was something singularly interesting in Louis' conversation; not the talk of the drawing-room, but his talk when he was alone with men. He had seen so much of human nature under such exceptional conditions, he had a caustic epigrammatic method of condensing his bitter truths into sharp arrowy sentences, that left a sting, as it were, behind. He had travelled widely, and travelled in out-of-the-way and unvisited places. But it was never among the woods and forests and seas. He had never penetrated the primeval forest; never sailed on the unknown seas, or felt the simoom in the midst of the desert. These were not what he had sought. It was always cities, never

Nature, that he had visited, and sojourned within. And such places within those cities as the world never dreamed existed upon the earth: the lowest beerhouse, the most miserable estaminet, the worst, the dirtiest, the most criminal and abandoned districts. Not that he lowered himself to intoxication, or to still worse pleasures in those sties of iniquity. He did not go there for what others went; he visited them to watch, and study the habits and thoughts of those who frequented the place for the gratification of their desires. As the student of medicine and surgery is made acquainted with the filthiest and most repulsive phases of disease, so Louis studied the most loathsome and coarsely *outré* states of life, not that he might gain an insight, or learn a lesson from which to teach or better mankind, but simply and solely from a desire—a craving unnatural desire—to see man in his ‘nakedness.’ Not the nakedness of the body, but the exposure of the animal instincts, the hate, the cruelty, the avarice, and the lust. He would stand for

hours by the bar of the lowest public-house, sipping a single glass of weak brandy-and-water, lazily watching out of his half-closed eyes the motions, or listening to the talk, of the brutes in human form who made that house their chief resort. With the microscope of his mind he dissected the characters of these creatures—they cannot be called men.

This was a strange occupation for a peer of England; for Louis was a peer, though he rarely used the title.

What reason was there for this morbid frame of mind? Was it that he was dimly conscious of his own unutterable baseness, of the total lack of moral consciousness within him, that led him to take a miserable pleasure in thus proving to his own satisfaction that such was the normal condition of mankind? But this was not all that he had seen. By the aid of the acquaintances picked up in these dens of infamy, he had penetrated into fraternities whose very existence was utterly unsuspected; even into that most secret and nameless band some of whose members could be found at

Antwerp in the autumn of the year. Here he had learnt strange and startling novelties of thought; here he had seen and studied men whose minds and lives marked them out as distinctly as if they had been inhabitants of another world. He knew curious secrets of the Commune, of the societies that still pester the peace of the Continent. In one word, he knew as no other man did the weird, the bizarre, and the devilish in human life.

This man became Pierce's constant companion—Pierce the mild, the gentle, and the blameless. It was the fascination of his talk which threw a light over him. It was the novelty, the utter antithesis. It was the opportunity for a study which had never occurred to Pierce, the great student, before. It was reading the 'world' as in a book. Through it all Louis made him and others feel that whatever he had seen, whatever he had heard, he, Louis, remained undefiled, an English gentleman still. That this was the case his manner was strong testimony—ele-



gant, and gentlemanly polite, pleasant; ever ready to forward the amusement of others.

This man, of all others, married Heloise. Looking back afterwards Pierce said it was occasioned by his 'folly'—his endeavour to keep her to himself by secluding her. She had seen so little of the world, she had had no variety to choose from. Carlotta encouraged the match. Horton left them long before anything of this was talked of—went back to his bullion, his bills, his loans; silent as to where his care laid—here or there. Carlotta remained. She and Louis and Heloise went about together as brother and sisters. They rode together; they rambled upon the hills; always these three—never Louis and Carlotta alone, never Heloise and Louis alone. There was nothing in this that any one could disapprove of. But yet at times Pierce felt that there was a chord of sympathy—a faint invisible connection—between Carlotta and Louis which he could not understand. Their bearing towards each other was haughty and distant; yet they were, it seemed,

ever animated by the same impulses. It only occurred to him at times ; it was a passing impression—a dream that came and went, and left no tangible mark behind. He was glad, or professed to be glad—tried to argue himself into being glad—that Carlotta and Heloise were so friendly. It was a reunion after so many years. It was as it ought to be.

Carlotta was very generous over the marriage. She presented Heloise with a magnificent set of diamonds; she showered presents upon her; she clothed her in garments of priceless value, till Heloise cried out shrinkingly that these things were not meet for her. Her innate modesty arose, and for the time overcame the natural vanity of a mere child; for she was but nineteen. But Carlotta, the subtle, over-persuaded her, and she accepted them, as she had accepted Louis—partly, at least—at Carlotta's hands.

After the wedding the bride and bridegroom went to the Lakes; after that to London, at Heloise's own special desire.



## CHAPTER IV.

AT least Louis believed he loved her. It was the fact, at any rate, that he had felt towards her as he had felt towards no other human being before. No other emotion had ever occurred to him that he could not analyse, that he could not destroy with merciless criticism—not sparing himself. But Heloise exercised an influence over him which he could not analyse. It hurried him on too rapidly. She was the last that, in his calmer moments, he would have chosen—the last that he had ever pictured to himself as occupying the position of his wife. Like all other men who belong, in however distant a manner, to his class, Louis avoided the idea of a wife. It was synonymous, in his accepted creed, with innumerable vexations to which no reasonable man could submit. But she had

swept away these thoughts—subverted the order of his mind. The idea of vexation, of annoyance, never entered his mind as possible in connection with her during that brief period of wild dreaming at Avonbourne—wild, inasmuch as it carried away the reflective portion of the man. It was the highest elevation that Louis ever reached in his whole moral existence. The dormant soul, latent even in the sceptical, reasoning, questioning, ever-doubting Pyrrhonist, rose to the surface—struggled itself out, attracted by the magnetism of Heloise's wondrous beauty and purity. For a brief period it raised itself in conquest over the mind and the brain, over the accumulated doubt of years. The soul stood confessed in the man who disbelieved in its existence. Louis' whole being was wrapped up in her for those three or four months in the natural life at Avonbourne. He believed he loved her. Those who knew his previous course would have pronounced love impossible to him. To us, however, judging him impartially, it is clear that for

the hour and the day Louis did love Heloise with the whole force of the divine passion. Her single face, her single person, was powerful enough to overcome the influences which had been growing up around him for years. Her voice overcame the sophistries of the hundreds with whom he had conversed ; it penetrated to his very heart.

And Heloise? She knew nothing of love, so to say. She had had no experience in these things. An innocent girl, hardly out of her childhood, pure of heart and mind, secluded from all society, how should she learn to analyse her feelings, and to distinguish between the real emotion and the transient excitement? One thing she, in all her innocence, could not help seeing—Louis' wildest, blindest admiration of her. Inexperienced, and uneducated in the science of the heart, those symptoms thrilled a chord that existed somewhere in her own bosom. The necessity to love and to be loved existed in her heart; he caused that string to vibrate, and how was she to distinguish whether or no his was the

master-hand, if he only could play it aright? Shall we confess that Heloise, in her girlish way, felt a little proud of her lover? Will that lower her in one's estimation? It was so natural in a girl so much secluded, so purely unartificial. She could not help a little, just a little, warmth of pleasure in the thought that this man of the world should see anything to admire in *her*. This very pride in his admiration arose out of the low value she put upon herself. A man of the world—there was no little charm in that. So deep, so profound and original a thinker as he seemed to be to her—such an apostle, as it were, of a state of things and a mode of thought of which previously she had had no conception—he dazzled her.

So, too, he dazzled Pierce. Yet Pierce had twinges of misgiving. But Carlotta wound him about with her logic of society. This man was a great match. He was rich, he was titled, he had high connections. Such an opportunity would never again happen to the humble dwellers in Bourne Manor. It



would be a lasting honour to the family. The man himself, too, had sown his wild oats. He was old enough to settle down into a good and affectionate husband. It was evident how deeply he loved her. Subtle Carlotta went one step farther. She just hinted something more—she did not say so plainly, but she suggested the idea to Pierce's mind that unless the offer was accepted Heloise would never have another chance of rising to her half-sister's elevated position. This decided Pierce. Heloise must be as high as Carlotta. His tender and affectionate mind felt a jealous ambition for her. Yes: the offer must be accepted.

Easy it is now to understand why Heloise was so happy at the Haymarket. It was fairy-land to her. These things, these sights and scenes and amusements, long over-done and nauseous to a satiated appetite, were new and entrancing to her. How she entered into the excitement of the hour! her heart, glowing with delight, expressing unaffected admiration.

This gushing palled upon Louis. He

argued with himself that it was right and proper and best that it should be so. It was better that his wife should be pure, fresh, and innocent; he could trust her. As a refined student of human nature, he should, even in his most passionless moments, have chosen a new heart, so to say—one on which no self-imposed task of deceit had as yet stamped its mark. It was the greatest safeguard against those follies and those vexations which married life is certain to bring in its wake. He could mould her, too, as he pleased. Thus he tried to deceive himself—to argue his own mind into satisfaction. How many thousands of us are, at this moment, earnestly engaged in the same attempt! And as soon as we have partially succeeded, we shut our eyes and slumber, as if sleep could assure us protection from the rising storm—as if the lightning would pass us over. Sharp is the awakening from this somnolency.

This perpetual gushing he tried to call in his own mind the natural and healthy delight of a new heart. But the very term

‘gushing’ would recur to his mind. He could not help but note it—it palled upon him. Gradually and imperceptibly it engendered a contemptuous feeling—a sense of superiority. At Avonbourne she had appeared so superior to him. Now he slowly grew conscious of a species of superiority which he possessed over her. By degrees he came to criticise and analyse her, to watch her face, to study her mind and her ways. The result was the production of a process of drawing parallelisms between her and those low and brutal characters which he had lived amongst so long. Heloise compared to them—Heloise the pure at heart, the unaffected, the natural, the very type of the creature that ‘thinketh no evil’—compared with the ruffians of the gambling saloons, and a parallelism instituted between her and such as they were! Louis argued in this way: she has the same instincts as they have. How greatly she enjoyed the fragrant bouquet of the priceless wines he set before her, novel, and unknown to her palate before—wines un-

heard of in the simple life at Avonbourne! It was true that she drank but the merest drop—the sipping of a bird was not more in *amount*, but the *pleasure* was there equally, and was perhaps more than if she had partaken largely. These shows and theatres—see how her eyes sparkled as they entered the glittering palaces of the drama and the song! Different in degree, it was the same in kind with the maddening enthusiasm of the wildest San Franciscan frequenter of the lowest theatrical saloon—subdued, toned down, it might be; but still she possessed the same animal instincts as the rest of common humanity. Had she been exposed to the vile influences that other unfortunate women had been, doubtless she would have succumbed as they had done, and become the most degraded of all spectacles. Mark this: Louis always assumed the possibility of the good deteriorating to the bad. He never gave a thought to the equal possibility that the wicked and the degraded would have been honest and true had they enjoyed the

same favourable conditions. Thus in these speculations he carried out his old habit of studying the worst side of human nature. He reduced Heloise, in the abstract, to the level of the pariahs of society.

Contempt for her grew by degrees into contempt for himself. He looked back upon that dream at Avonbourne as a species of insanity. He sneered at the recollection of himself. All the old habits rose up strong and irresistible in his heart. He yearned to go back to himself again ; for she had partially, and for a time, drawn him out of himself, made him for a while, at least, recognise that another human being had feelings and hopes and joys. But he could not remain thus. All the old instincts, all the habits acquired in so many years of perfect freedom, pulled and dragged at him harder and fiercer every day. They would not be denied. He felt it to be a bondage to be always with her. Though he had nothing to do, even if he omitted all those tender cares and little kindly efforts for her pleasure—as

he began to omit them now—still there remained her presence, in itself a weariness to the flesh. He grew to detest the sight and sound of her. He chose a solitary room, and restlessly fidgeted at the echo of her approaching footstep. He was always occupied when she came near to him. He did not wish to be disturbed. He, who had never done an hour's work in his life, began to be full of business—important business that could not be delayed, that must be attended to, that required absolute solitude and silence, that made him irritable when intruded on, even by her, his dear Heloise.

It was long before she noticed the change that had come over him. She accepted his explanation in all good faith—she attributed all his irritable ways and desire to be away from her to the cares of business. She had a dim kind of idea that every man had a business to attend to. She never thought of doubting him. But when this went on for weeks, when she found herself, night after night, alone in the box at the theatre, a sense



of loneliness, almost a sense of a wrong done to her, stole over her mind. She made no complaint ; she did not even hint at her disappointment ; but she tried, with unwearied attention, to win him back to her side. It was her own fault, she said to herself ; she had enjoyed the change and the excitement and the amusement too much ; she had neglected him. She ceased to go to the theatres, and came and sat with Louis. This made it ten times worse. Secretly, as soon as her carriage had left, he had of late gone out into the town, always returning before the time when she would return. He wished to be free of her company. Now she came and forced herself upon him. For an evening or two he bore it, without outward show, beyond an ill-suppressed restlessness. Even at the last he could not boldly say out that he wished to be alone. There was something about this girl, in her purity and her innocence, which made it impossible to insult her, or even to openly wound her. The third evening he left the room for a moment, and

never returned. She did not see him till breakfast; still in her own mind she did not accuse him. The scales were long in falling from her eyes—so implicitly had she believed every word that fell from him at Avonbourne, so carefully had she treasured up the memory of those impassioned tones. But this occurred again and again.

She was always alone now. She could not go out, and enjoy herself as before. A heavy dulness began to overshadow her. The presence of a trouble never left her. Her wild and impetuous spirits fell. At last she realised the fact that he avoided her, that he wished her at a distance. Then she had a hard and wretched task. It was to keep away from him, and yet not to seem to avoid him of her own accord; to watch his mood, to be ready at any moment to please him, and yet at the same time not to interfere with his habits.

Why did she not go to Carlotta—her elder sister, the woman of the world, skilled in men and their ways? Might she not have obtained assistance there?

Heloise could not tell why, but although this resource had presented itself to her mind, yet she shrank from it—shrank from pouring her tale into that woman's ears. Why was it? She had no reason whatever. It was one of those inexplicable instincts which seize upon the mind. Therefore she consumed her grief in silence and solitude. And Pierce, her father and her teacher—why not fly to him for advice and help in this the first misery of her young life? Because she would not blame Louis. Pierce would instantly come to the conclusion that it was Louis's fault. The feeling of the wife revolted against casting blame upon her husband; still greater was the dislike which arose after a time in her mind to reveal his lack of the qualities she had loved him for. No; it must remain a secret in her heart; she would show no sign. Heloise did not think all this out in strict reasoning, but it passed half unconsciously through her mind. So she became an almost total recluse, seldom leaving the mansion night or day. So he, too,

became an almost total absentee ; never seen in the evening, coming home in the early hours of the morning, sleeping till noon, sitting by himself the afternoon, or passing out into the Unknown ; for when he went out, to her he passed into the Unknown. Her mind could not suggest his probable course in that great desert of London.

Gradually their habits became entirely estranged. He had his rooms apart from hers—unconnected in any way ; so that he could come in or out utterly without her knowledge. He never inquired after her motions.

The days grew longer and longer to Heloise ; the evenings almost unbearable. She had ceased to use those affectionate caresses and endearments to retain him at her side. She recognised their utter powerlessness. Her step grew languid and slow ; the old impetuosity and perpetual motion left her by degrees. The long evenings were her especial dread. It was thus that she recalled to mind, one night early in September, that they had been

married just three months, only a quarter of a year. To her it seemed an age ago. That morning, when the joy bells rang out at Avonbourne, had faded away into the far-off distance. She tried to recall her feelings on that day. It was a vision; the whole scene had vanished—the hopes had fled.

Can you blame her, can you sneer at her? The warm tears *would* force themselves into her eyes, and for the first time Heloise, burying her face on the cushion of the ottoman, lost her whole consciousness in bitter, bitter weeping.





## CHAPTER V.

SHE was standing on the broad steps that lead up to the entrance of the British Museum. The afternoon sun of the autumn day shone yellow and lurid upon her tall and commanding figure, while her wealth of golden hair glittered in the rays. Her right hand was slightly uplifted, pointing at the edifice, and her face was turned somewhat over her shoulder to address a gentleman who followed immediately behind. She was a grand and noble creature, this Georgiana Knoyle, the banker's sister — tall as a goddess of the classic time, large limbed, moulded in a generous and full-developed manner by the great artist Nature. No miserable and wretched tight-laced stays had disfigured her waist. It would have been called large in these artificial times, when the fetishes of



fashion are so devoutly worshipped. But where in all the superb statues of antiquity will you find one single woman, meant to represent an ideal of beauty, with a small and wasp-like waist? The Venus de Medicis, all the statues of Venus, even the very Psyche—the ideal of fragility—one and all are sculptured with a torso, lessening in diameter, it is true, above the hips, but only gradually and gently so. The curve is slow and gradual; there is no sharp ‘dig’ inwards, so to say. The waist of the Venus, if a person of the same size were clothed in modern dress, would be called coarse and vulgar in this modern day. Yet the whole world has agreed to regard these statues as the canon of female beauty. Georgiana’s shoulders, too, were called high and masculine by her friends—in good truth, they were perfectly developed, nothing more. They did not slope rapidly from her neck downwards, like the sides of a pyramid; they had a perceptible width, a breadth about them; in other words, she had a *chest*, which is what few women have, and in that chest was

a pair of vigorous lungs and a regularly-beating healthy heart. Falser taste there cannot be than the artificial and acquired one which delights in a neck sloping like the eaves of a house, with prominent bust, no chest, small waist, and large hips. Falser still the miserable, affected, stilted walk which has been the rule of late years, as if all ladies suffered from weakness of the spine, and had an iron up it to keep the back at a certain angle with the legs, much as children's legs are sometimes ironed for weak ankles. The huge and extended 'bustle'—horrid excrescence!—found no place in Georgiana's dress. She walked perfectly upright, as God had designed her to walk, putting her feet firmly down upon the ground, feet unencumbered with narrow and high heels. Her limbs moved freely; hence her walk was striking and stately, as those antique statues would have walked could they have been warmed into life. Her dearest female friends called her high shouldered, large waisted, gawky; 'no figure, you know, my dear, but a very estimable person,

very, only somewhat eccentric.' In that peculiar hazy light, so soft and yet so lurid, her face, turned towards him, and sculptured in classic shape, with its clear and regular features, shone to him almost as that of a goddess, or of a Genius at least—the very Genius of that place they were about to enter.

Commonplace British Museum, 'open to the public every day except'—what day is it?—'no refreshments allowed,' with its crowd of commonplace people; in Bloomsbury, poor, paltry, and second-class Bloomsbury. A goddess here, a romance here, a Genius of this place? Pooh!

But a goddess and a Genius she seemed to him, a noble and inspired creature, as she paused a moment on those broad steps, and a light shone out from her large gray eyes.

'This is the Temple, Neville,' she said in a low voice, for there were others about, 'the true and real sanctified place of worship, at least of reverence. In these walls are collected the fruit of man's inspirations and achievements, and the records of his thought, his

mind, his soul, for full six thousand years. What were the contents of the Delphic fane to the treasures that are here? What were the wretched gold and silver shields, the trophies, the offerings of kings and principalities—poor articles of uselessness stored up at Delphi—compared with the accumulated wisdom of ages carefully preserved here? The very Tabernacle itself, ay, and the temple of Solomon at Jerusalem, did not contain one-half the glory that lies hidden here. The spirit of God that dwelt with the prophets and the patriarchs, that inspired the founder of the Buddhist religion, of the Sabæan, of the Egyptian, of the Olympian—all these, and many more—is here. Here are the Bibles of the universe—not only the truths collected by one race, be they Hebrew, or Egyptian, or Hindoo, or Arabian, or Chinese, but the truths discovered by the souls of the mighty men, the chosen of Heaven, who have lived in all countries since the world began. And who, reading these in a proper and appreciative frame of mind, shall not feel the

spirit of God, the Shechinah as it were, dwelling in this place? This is the Temple; this is the true consecrated spot. To me, Neville, it is grander far than the pretentious St. Paul's, grander than the St. Peter's at Rome. He who would find truth, let him come here.'

'I agree with you partly,' said Neville, as they passed on into the Museum. 'I think that it is a temple in the truest and most real meaning of the word; but to me the spirit, the divine inflatus, the Shechinah, never has dwelt or can dwell in any building or place which has been constructed by man. There is a something, an invisible influence, irradiating from the hewn stone, the mortar, which repels my mind—forces it back upon itself.

“There, on the benches, in the hall,  
Thought, hearing, sight, forsake me all.”

I cannot step, as it were, upon the tripod, and feel the divine spirit animating me in any spot where the mark of man's hand remains. It is an instinct, Georgie; I cannot help it. I recoil from the stone wall, the *hewn* stone.

It is an instinct deep down in the human soul; else how is it that the ancient worshipper built his altar of unhewn stone, and the Founder of the religion of our day ever lived, and spoke, and taught in the mountain, and the grove and the garden, surrounded by the works of His Father, not by the works of man's hands? Beneath the shadow if only of a single tree, gazing dreamily upwards through the boughs and leaves at the azure sky, listening to the breeze—"the sound of a going in the tree-tops"—there is a something that enters into me, and carries me away with it in lofty dreams and hopes. Here there is none of that. The inspiration here is of pure intellect only.'

'Perhaps it is the difference between our woman's and man's nature,' said Georgie; 'but I can think so much better and feel so much more *indoors*. Outdoors I am distracted with so many things; so many trifles disturb me; my gaze rambles and my mind wanders. I require walls round me to shut it in. These are the cases we came to see.'



Either for her blessing or for her curse Georgiana Knoyle had been gifted with a mind ample and vigorous beyond the usual allowance of her sex ; not that exactly, for it implies a want of mind in the majority ; but, in other words, she had a mind which, for a feminine one, was strongly scientific, logical, and masculine. Her brother, the banker, was conspicuous for the power and breadth of his intellect ; but it had taken a different course. He had bent it upon money, and the result was evident in the enormous wealth which flowed at his feet. Her parents were long deceased, and left to herself entirely without trammels—for she had a competent fortune, and her brother never interfered—she developed a strongly-marked character. She was, in fact, an advocate of the mental and moral rights of women—not confining her conception of those rights to the power to sit in Parliament, or to vote, but looking rather to the æsthetic side of the question, arguing that women should receive a higher education, should be placed on a broader and freer

platform. She did not attempt to prove that woman was equal, or ever could be equal, to man in strength, bodily or mental; what she did most earnestly believe and most earnestly advocate was, that, in her own particular way, woman had gifts parallel in utility to those of man. Woman should not strive to emulate or to mix indiscriminately with man. Her platform should be distinct, but equally high, and equally free and open. Strictly logical in all her deductions, reflective and contemplative to a superior degree, Georgiana recognised what no other leader of her party had done—that to place woman in such a position as this, to admit that such was the position she should occupy, was to reopen all those questions which the world had settled in effect, if not in detail, during the last six thousand years. She boldly admitted that the whole accepted theories of social government, and consequently of religion, must be reconstructed. They must be traced back to their original beginnings, and rebuilt up. In carrying out this idea to its conclusions, she

saw that the very first commencement of such a scheme must be the rewriting (to coin a phrase) of history. The history of man must be rewritten. His real, and not his mythical, origin must be ascertained ; so that his relations with other men, and with Nature and Nature's laws, might be fully understood. That his history was at best but very imperfectly understood or suspected, Georgiana most fully believed. She saw that even in comparatively recent and well-recorded times vast populations, inhabiting whole continents of the earth, had lived out their natural lives and passed away without a monument, almost without a name. What had become of the enormous multitudes who had existed in the interior of Asia, and about whom we absolutely had nothing but faint traditions ? While the deeds, the wars, and policies of a single small state—a mere fraction of the human race—had been so vividly described by its historians, while Greece lived in the pages of Thucydides, Xenophon, and Herodotus, what had become of the huge hordes, the mighty

millions of unknown men, contemporaneous with these events, but who were utterly lost to sight? Of the existence of such millions the roll-call of Xerxes' army was a sufficient proof. But before these—before the dawn of any written history, before the dawn even of mythical history—what myriads of nations must have lived and passed away without a sign! Before these again, in the glacial period, in the pre-glacial period, according to modern science, men had existed. What was their history? What were their social relations? How did they stand in relation to Nature and Nature's laws? They had some inkling of civilisation, it was clear; they had weapons, tools, houses, tombs. But before them? The primeval inhabitants of earth, who were they, and what was their history? Were they an indescribable race—higher than an ape and lower than a negro; half-breeds between brute and human intelligence; or were they as demi-gods, and were the existing races but deteriorating descendants of these wondrous beings?

She saw that it was not her calling to go forth to the world, to stand upon the public platform or the week-day pulpit, preaching the masses into the conception of the idea of woman's equality. She was not gifted with the ready flow of speech, the quick repartee, necessary to such a career ; neither had she the peculiar strength of fibre, the calibre, for such battling hand to hand. Hers was the thoughtful part—her portion was the student's. Therefore she had addressed herself to this—to search out and discover the first beginnings of man upon the earth, to trace his history and his development, to write his prehistoric history. This was why she was examining the cases of prehistoric weapons in the Museum.

Neville did not agree with her in all things, accepted lover as he was, thoughtful and just to all who differed from him as he was. But on this one point their diverging theories met and held common course. Above all things it was necessary to search into the early history of man. Upon this must be

based the premisses from which a new, and yet an old, faith and belief and social superstructure must be reared. For he, too, was reconstructing in his own mind, with deep thought and reverent search for truth, that fabric of belief which is necessary for the repose of the human soul, and which science had shattered to pieces.

Hence he threw himself with ardour into her study, and laboured hard to furnish her with new facts and new conjectures for her projected work on the 'Prehistoric History of Man.' He had been with her to Brussels, to Vienna, to Paris, to a dozen other places where the learned and the curious had preserved fragments of the great wreck of Time. They were only lovers, yet he had accompanied her. In any other than Georgie the scandal would have been great; but even the gossip-loving coteries of highest and most 'particular' society could not even think of wrong in connection with Georgiana Knoyle. They laughed at her, sneered at her, but secretly they acknowledged her depth and



strength of character. And these two had travelled in the most open manner : she with her maids, and even footmen; he with his attendants; never living at the same hotels; scrupulously observing the requirements of the strictest propriety. The banker her brother did not interfere; he spoke of it openly before all. Still, of course, society would have cavilled, had it not been for her intense individuality, which overcame the breath of slander. They knew that evil was impossible to her; her intellect would forbid it. Temptation even would never enter in at those calm serene gray eyes. Moreover, there were many who in their secret hearts, although they professedly sneered at such things, yet gladly hailed the innovation as one step in advance in casting off those trammels which bound women down like slaves—slaves of the drawing-room.

They were very happy, these two—Neville and Georgie. He was a tall and noble-looking man. That was not it; they were in such perfect accord of soul. Though their creeds

differed in detail, yet they were working out the same great problems of existence.

This afternoon they were particularly interested in the large flint spear-head exhibited in one of these cases. Dating from an unknown antiquity, it showed a beauty of execution which seemed impossible in that rude age, in that rude material—so true its edge, so elegant its shape! It was wonderful how so hard and yet so splintery a substance as flint could be worked, without the aid of modern tools, to such perfection of form. But in these flints—which could tell no tales, which bore no inscriptions—Georgiana lamented that they seemed to have reached the limit of human research. The fragmentary record broke off with these, and before that all was darkness and obscurity.

Neville thought differently. He believed that vast fields of research were as yet unexplored. Lyell and other eminent geologists had demonstrated that the surface of the earth had been raised, and again lowered, and raised again; so that whole continents

once teeming with population had been buried by degrees below the waves; and this ages before history began. The first thing to do was to decide the probable position and boundaries of these continents and countries of a prehistoric time. Then, with the aid of modern appliances, the whole area at the bottom of the sea should be trawled, which would bring up any surface remains of antique civilisation.

In all human probability the immobility of the water at such great depths had preserved the remains of man's works in as perfect a state as the pure air of Egypt had preserved the temples of that land. The diving-bell, too, at the present was a rude instrument; in the future it might be so improved as to allow of extended operations under water; and then, in interesting localities, excavations might be made, just as they are on earth, in the tumuli of the watery plains.

‘But,’ said Neville, ‘what, above all other things, has always filled my mind with a

species of fascination is the thought of the unknown regions that may lie stretching in vast sublimity of solitude in the extreme South. The Northern Pole is commonplace in comparison—it has been *surrounded* by man, the edge has been visited; but the South is a mystery. There the ice rises in one immense wall or cliff of two hundred feet in height, and this vast mountain of ice is but the edge of an illimitable glacier, slowly moving with the sea from countries utterly unvisited even in the myths of man. They tell us of the men of the glacier period—the progenitors, the aborigines of the known earth; may it not be possible that the remnants of that race, retiring with the retiring snow, may have followed the icy plains back into those remote regions, as the ancient Britons fell back before the invaders into Wales?’

‘O Neville,’ said Georgie, as they stood again on the steps of the Museum, on their way out, ‘I had forgotten. I am ashamed. I have never visited my new sister!’

‘Your new sister?’

‘I mean Horton’s wife’s sister, then—Louis’s wife, Heloise. I have never seen her; they say she is lovely. We came back from Paris a week ago—she must think it very strange of me. I will go immediately.’

Neville saw her to her carriage, and hailing a hansom himself, drove to his chambers.





## CHAPTER VI.

HE knew that Knoyle was the name of his mistress's sister ; he knew they were family relations. He knew that his mistress was always in the second drawing-room that overlooked the garden in the evening. Thus it was that the footman committed the greatest mistake he had ever made in his life. Without first seeing that his mistress was ready to receive, he ushered Georgiana straight into the room, where Heloise was lying on the ottoman. Hearing footsteps she started up, and her tear-stained face and disordered hair gave Georgie a shock. She felt, too, that she had intruded ; but it was too late to go back. She walked rapidly to Heloise, and took both her hands, and kissed her.

It is impossible to recount in hard dry words, in expressionless ink, how this grand and noble woman soothed the throbbing



heart of poor Heloise, and by slow steps strengthened her to meet her misery with greater firmness. Before that one evening was past all had been confided to Georgie. Instinctively Heloise felt that she had found a friend on whose arm she might lean, to whom she might cling, as it was necessary to her fragile nature to cling to some one. And Georgie found here a mission, it may be more truly glorious, if not so high sounding, as the search for prehistoric history.

From that evening the visits of Georgiana became more and more frequent, until at last not a day passed without her presence; and she grew to be a part of Heloise's daily life. There was something about Heloise which was singularly attractive to one of Georgie's temperament. She was so unaffected—so purely natural, without any of the *blasé* air so common to those who have moved much in society. Her heart was open. Georgie soon found the way to it. Here, too, was a new field for her mission. Here was a rare opportunity to put into practice that work

which she had in view. Very slowly, and by imperceptible degrees, Georgie drew Heloise's mind to dwell upon the destiny and the position of woman in the abstract. This in itself was a relief to Heloise's overburdened mind, strained and tired with too much brooding upon herself. And it was so entirely novel. The very idea of attempting to alter the social relations of woman had never been presented to her before. She had never questioned the present state of things ; never doubted but that they were natural and right. The very naïveness of her questions and remarks often disconcerted Georgie ; but she persevered, and in time had so far succeeded, that Heloise really did of her own will look around her, and begin to compare the condition of woman as she was with the condition of woman as she might be.

But here arose a danger which Georgie had not foreseen, but of which she afterwards blamed herself as the originator and cause. Heloise, from the consideration of the rights and wrongs of woman in the abstract, by a

very simple process of reasoning began to reflect upon the possibility of an improvement in her own position. Was her contract of marriage with Louis the right or the wrong thing? Was it a holy and perpetual bond, as she had been taught to believe, or was it a tyranny and an unjust repression of her nature?

Questioning herself in this way, Heloise, after a while, came to ask herself, did she love this man Louis? The question occurred to her as it were suddenly, and as a shock. It made her tremble a little, as she thought of it. It made her feel guilty. She was ashamed of herself—she felt so unfaithful to him. She drove the idea out of her mind—for the time at least.

Louis was less and less at home. But he was quite aware of the growing intimacy between his wife and Georgiana Knoyle, and he knew, too, the nature of the teaching which Georgie was striving to inculcate. When he was at home he would come and sit with them, and sneer at her in his Mephisto-like manner. He did not repeat the old jibes of

woman's incompetency, but he thrust in sharp observations of his own completely new to Georgie. They silenced her for the moment; but the very fact of an opposition was enough to rouse her zeal, and she studied and searched her authorities to discover a reply. Then he treated her with contemptuous indifference.

Though she tried to be more than woman, Georgie could not suppress a rising hatred of this man, which she called to herself indignation at his treatment of Heloise, but which arose quite as much from her own wounded self-esteem. Thus it came about that she grew to some extent interested in his goings out and movements. She watched him after a manner. It was easy to track him, for his steps led always to one place; and the beaten path was clear to follow, though Heloise, in her simplicity, had never suspected it. He was always at Carlotta's. The great banker was at Berlin, or rather he vibrated between Berlin and Paris, engaged in momentous matters of statecraft and money commingled;

but his peeress remained at her mansion in the West-end, notwithstanding the fact that the season was long over. Louis was there for ever. He did not attend upon Carlotta in public; but her house was rarely ever free of him.

Georgie soon learnt this. Her heart—her untamable woman's heart—began to burn fiercely with rage and hatred of Louis, and mingled with it was no small share of dislike of Carlotta, between whom and herself there had never been the slightest approach to familiarity. The peeress looked down with ineffable contempt, from the height of her own sublime elevation, her aristocratic position, her unquestioned and striking beauty, upon that poor 'eccentric creature with the enormous waist.' Georgie felt that Carlotta despised her, and although she professed and tried hard not to care a rap, it was impossible to utterly subvert the workings of her heart. She never would have admitted to herself that she hated Carlotta, but such in fact was the case.

Under the pretext, then, that it was in the

interest of Heloise, she became an earnest observer of what took place between Louis and Carlotta. She began to debate in her own mind the propriety of remonstrating with her brother, and calling his attention to the superabundant familiarity, the rather too great intercourse which existed between his wife and Louis. She seriously contemplated a journey to Berlin, to open his eyes, to disabuse him of that fatuous and blind belief in his wife, the peeress, which he appeared to have. But Georgie was, be it remembered, a sharp and logical reasoner. How would Horton receive her? Would he not, in his calmly practical way, point out to her that she had overstepped even the bounds of sisterly affection in thus coming between a man and his wife? He would assuredly ask her for proofs; and where were her proofs? Proofs of what? She was obliged to own to herself that she did not even know what it was she required proof of. Louis's simple visits went for nothing. And a little self-condemnation arose in her mind as she remembered that she herself had not



always acted on the strict lines of decorum and propriety, as laid down by the world. Her ramblings from one capital to another in company with Neville were much more suspicious, looked at in this light, than the mere visits of Louis, especially to a mansion full of servants, full of eyes and ears ever on the watch. No; she dared not go to Horton. Thinking it over still more deeply, Georgie became convinced that, whatever amount of badinage or even strong flirtation there might be, there was nothing worse between Louis and Carlotta. She was forced, in spite of herself, to do this much justice to her sister-in-law. She remembered Carlotta's career; her imperious manner; her overweening vanity and self-reliance; her almost fierce self-assertion; the potential force of her individuality. A mind and soul so wholly given up to vanity and to ambition was of necessity armour-proof against all dangerous affections. It was a relief to her mind to feel that, whatever Carlotta might do, she was perfectly pure.

That there was something—that there was

a secret undercurrent of something—was obvious from one single fact alone: Carlotta never came to visit Heloise. Regularly twice a week her carriage called, and a polite inquiry was made; but never by any chance did she call or invite Heloise to her own house. There was a tacit suspension of relationship.

Heloise was calmer, even in a sense happy, with Georgie; but she did not recover her old impetuous manner. The lightness, the spring and elasticity, had gone from her movements; the flash had left her eye. She lived in a subdued manner; her vivacity was absent.

These circumstances of real life, so different from any which she had as yet encountered, brought home the difficulties of her theory vividly to Georgie's mind: how to arrange the social relations so as to amend and ameliorate these jars and discords; how provide against their recurrence under any new system. And as Heloise had done, so Georgie in her turn began to contemplate the position in which she herself stood with regard to the new creed of the rights and wrongs of woman. She was

engaged to Neville; the marriage was rapidly approaching. At such a time, when her feelings were naturally peculiarly sensitive, the spectacle of these two unhappy marriages came before her eyes. She had heard of such things before. But now the whole details of the thing were laid bare to her eyes with a trying minuteness. It was true that Neville, as she recollected with a glow of natural satisfaction, was not like either of those men, Horton or Louis. It was also true—ah, Georgie, your vanity peeped out there—that she herself was different. But there were indefinite possibilities of discord evidently in married life. And what struck her as the worst of all was the impossibility of escape when once the ceremony was completed. Let the wife be never so miserable, let the husband be never so disagreeable, there was no escape. It was only after the close intercourse which followed marriage that the true characteristics of man and woman came out; it was in that familiar relation that the weak points first came into view.

Louis had sneeringly said the other day that wives, in his opinion, ought to have written characters, as servants had; and if the character was false or overdrawn, the husband should have the power to dissolve the marriage, and to prosecute the parent or guardian who had given him a wrong estimate of his bride. Georgie had bitterly retorted, that if the bride should be furnished with a written character, the bridegroom should be required to furnish two sureties in large sums for his good behaviour.

Georgie, with a smattering of physiology, had heard that the human being, at the end of three or seven years, at all events after a certain period of time, became totally reorganised. Every atom of the body was supplanted by another atom, new and strange. How, then, could a person, after this period of time, when this great and organic change had taken place, be supposed to retain the old affections in their full entirety? After three or seven years Neville might cease to love her. To look at the wretched state of things

around her, one would think that this organic change in some people took place much more rapidly. Heloise had barely been married four months.

Much as she loved him, Georgie began to doubt and to hesitate greatly to take the final and irrevocable vows with Neville.





## CHAPTER VII.

EXTREME ease and elegance of manner—an *abandon* the result of the highest breeding—curiously contrasted with an evident, and therefore vulgar, satisfaction with the flavour of a prime cigar. How inimitable the saunter; how Olympian the lounge! Ages of natural selection must have passed away before the survival of the fittest finally led to the production of so perfect a specimen of idleness. He was a very handsome fellow—there were no two opinions about that—and it was clear enough that he knew it. There was a delicious complacency about him, as much as to say that the whole world was contained within the compass of his waistcoat. If all within that waistcoat was happy and at peace, the universe must necessarily be in the highest possible state of



beatitude. Holding the cigar between the tips of two white and slender fingers of the left hand—fingers glittering with rings—he held it at a little distance from his lip, and the smoke rose up from the ash in graceful curls over his shoulder, while at the same time he cast sidelong glances at his figure reflected in the plate-glass windows of Regent-street. The wrists of a pair of lavender-kid gloves just protruded far enough to be seen from the bosom of his waistcoat—a bosom displaying a breadth of snow-white linen, with diamond studs flashing in the sunlight. A heavy gold chain passed across, and as it were braced, his figure, which diminished so elegantly at the waist as to give rise to the suspicion of the agency of stays. But that could hardly be: no stays could ever allow that peculiar swaying easy motion, obviously free from the least restraint. The suit—ah, the suit!—was indescribable. There was an air about it—the beauty of perfect proportion. His right hand carried a light cane, which he was perpetually swinging and holding in various positions, so as to fully dis-

play the dazzling whiteness of the small hand, and to flash the diamond ring on the finger. Down to the very boots the same overweening vanity exhibited itself. They were certainly very small feet, and very perfectly proportioned, and the instep was high and haughty; and not one of these advantages was hidden. This man was not one of those who hide their light under a bushel. A very dainty individual indeed! Notwithstanding the extreme affectation of the man, the most disgusted observer must have admitted that he was singularly handsome. The hawk-like eye—so large and full and dark, and burning with suppressed fire—was in itself a feature which no one could pass by without noticing. The nose was straight and delicately sculptured—hardly long enough or decided enough for a man, but exquisite in its carving. Long dark eyelashes swept the cheek, and a wealth of blue-black ringlets clustered round the ears and back of the head. These ringlets had been allowed to grow to a length almost too great for a gentleman in our stiff modern time, but

the solecism might be excused in even a man with such beautiful hair. But the lips were the loveliest part of him—so large and yet so delicately scarlet, and curved like the bow of the god of love—sensuous warm lips, that looked as if they fed on the dew of maidens' kisses. A very Don-Juan-looking man—such a fellow as you didn't very often meet. There was one drawback even to all this elegance and beauty. There is always a defect in all things mortal. Nothing is ever absolutely perfect. Even in the Venus de Medicis critics have been heard to declare that one leg was a little longer than the other. He was a trifle too stout. There was an obvious inclination to stoutness, and some indication of an excessive rotundity below the waistcoat. But even this only added to the air of complete complacency—the sleepy repose of the whole being.

How daintily he sauntered over the clean pavement, as gingerly as if it had been the dirtiest road! With what a hypercritical air he glanced in at the shop-windows! He paused before the famous photographic shop, where all

the notabilities of the hour are shown—from Bismarck and Don Carlos, or the Archbishop of Canterbury, to the latest ballet-dancers. Raising his eyeglass he superciliously examined the arm of that fair candidate for popular favour, and the leg of this. Easy enough to see upon what particular limb or feature the *artiste* depended to attract; it was always so prominently, so carefully displayed. Don Juan found fault with all; his gaze rested on neither long. This arm was too thick, too bulky at the shoulders; but then the public like size, something palpable and palpitating. This leg had too much calf, and that not enough; and O, what horrid hair! As for Bismarck and the Archbishop of Canterbury—pah! they were beneath notice. So we stroll on—lazily, softly, with our eyes half closed—taking no note of any passer-by; seeing nothing, feeling nothing, conscious of nothing but our own dear, delicious, darling self. Only we pause—we slacken our idle pace—one moment by Rimmel's, that our nostrils may be refreshed with the odour of innumerable flowers, and our soul, smelling a

‘sweet savour,’ may be strengthened to proceed through this poor dusty London, graced for a brief hour with our presence.

It was the time when the toiling artisans of London had already lived half a day. Rising at six, working steadily till noon, they had already finished half a day, and covered with dust and grime, weary with labour, were about to snatch a short hour of repose. They were permitted as a favour to grind their hard cheese and drink their vulgar porter; or, if they could afford it, they might even swallow a reeking mutton-chop. You see, some of us are made of mud, and some of us are made of cream and sugar, of almond paste, like the rind of a wedding-cake.

Our darling knocked at a friend’s at this particular hour, in order that he might enter and breakfast. Louis’s chambers were exquisitely fitted up, particularly they were furnished with every appliance for lounging. This was *his* temple, which he had dedicated to himself. Heloise had never heard of these chambers; Louis never thought of them while he

was in love (about three months) ; now he had recovered he found them extremely convenient. Here, without the slightest fear of interruption, he could indulge to the utmost in that cultivation of himself which was the very core and centre of his philosophy.

‘My dear Charles,’ said Louis, not troubling to rise from his couch, but extending the tip of his fingers, ‘I had given you up, and had commenced my coffee.’

‘My dear Charles’ very leisurely deposited his hat on the top of a Sèvres vase, and without taking the slightest notice of his host, sat, or rather reposed, himself upon another couch ; for Louis allowed no chairs in his establishment. The Romans, said he, were our masters in luxury. Their civilisation had none of that driving, hurrying, scurrying haste about it ; none of that dustiness—no smoke and steam and shoeblacks. There was a graceful repose in their very hurry. It was all a state of *festina lente*. Even Julius Cæsar himself, who posted one hundred miles a day through pathless forests, over rivers and deserts, with such



celerity as to anticipate intelligence of his movements, nevertheless found time, in the very moment of his death-agony, to fold his gown gracefully around his falling figure. There was a finish, a supreme polish, about these classical people which he, Louis, peculiarly admired. They carried it into the very smallest matters. What, for instance, less worthy of thought and care than the very dirt—the common earth—under a house? But these Romans—these artists—extended their care to the minutest trifles. This was how they prepared the foundation of a house or the floor of their halls: firstly, the damp earth was all carefully removed to the depth of several feet; then a layer of stones, rubble, and rough pieces of broken tile was placed as a groundwork. Over this was spread a layer of charcoal a few inches thick; over this a layer of finer gravel, and a fourth of hardest cement, on which the mosaic pavement was superposed. What careful provision against damp feet! What finished beauty in the meanest matters! These men — who were men, not ciphers who had

to hasten hither and thither as mere parts of some huge sum in figures—never sat on chairs; except, indeed, their magistrates when on duty. A chair was something so hard and angular, so upright and stiff. They reclined with graceful ease upon couches and pillows. Thus they added to the zest and pleasure of eating the charming sensation of repose. Louis, following this example, rigidly excluded all chairs, and all furniture approaching to the definition of a chair, even a footstool, from his rooms. Couches constructed from sketches of his own surrounded a table upon three sides. These couches were not flat, like the ordinary sofa, but the bed of the couch rose gradually like an inclined plane; and thus the body of the reposing person was prevented from feeling that disagreeable sense of repletion which must accompany eating in a lying position. The fourth side of the table was open to allow of the approach of the attendant, who thus placed the dish or the plate at once before you, without leaning over your shoulder or shoving it edgewise in at your

side. But Louis had added the conveniences of modern science to the elegances and comforts of ancient civilisation. By the side of each guest, in a small depression in the table, was a tiny ivory knob, the slightest pressure upon which instantly summoned an obedient slave by means of the electric flash. Each of the four corners of the room was hung with heavy purple curtains, leaving only a small space of the wall visible; and these small spaces, or panels, were painted, as at Pompeii, with *poses* of the nude figure, much as were Horace's chambers, according to that scurrilous and libellous Suetonius. Louis's defence of these sensuous and luscious pictures was ingenious and philosophical. He argued that something of such pleasure was essential, and indeed necessary, to the existence of mankind. If, therefore, they were necessary, it was better to enjoy them in this æsthetic and artistic way than through the mediation of the ruder and more primeval instincts.

There is nothing so difficult to furnish as a breakfast-table. Of course it is easy enough

for your lean and toiling rustic, whose rasher of greasy bacon and hunch of bread pleases his ravenous appetite. There are those who are content with potted salmon or even kippered herrings!

But your true epicure—your noonday riser—finds it extremely difficult to discover new and charming delicacies for his breakfast-table. It is easy comparatively to order a dinner. There is a breadth, a largeness, about dinner which affords ample room for the display of genius. The very succession of courses gives a scope which the one single spread of breakfast can never allow. Dinner is like a three-volume novel; breakfast is like an epigram. In the one you may be diffusive; in the other you must be pointed, or you are nowhere. Alas, how many suffering individuals, to whom Heaven has not vouchsafed an idea, have to be content with soda-water and brandy for their ‘matins’! But Louis’s breakfast-table was perfection—ever varied, ever delicate and appetising.

‘My dear Charles’ appreciated it greatly.

He ate, he drank, he sipped, he tasted, and said nothing; but his silence was more appreciative than words. One could imagine now how that rotundity under the waistcoat came into existence. People pay to see the lions fed; how much more to watch the gods at their meals! The cigar had not dulled the palate. Then he leant back and sighed gently, closed his eyes, and tapped slowly and musically with a silver spoon upon the table.

‘My dear Charles,’ said Louis, in a voice of winning entreaty, soft and low; and extending one hand he began to play with the wealth of black ringlets. Charles opened his eyes with a flash which made the other draw back as if he had seen lightning. Then Louis drew nearer, and began to purr. This old serpent of five-and-thirty had a low melodious voice (when he chose so to pitch it), and his words, rolling out softly and sweetly, filled the room with a monotonous cadence, like the murmur of falling waters—soft, endearing words—till Charles closed his eyes again. The spoon ceased to rap; Charles was

asleep. Then Louis fingered the ringlets, and admired the long and drooping eyelashes, and kissed the delicate white hand, and Heaven knows where his caresses might have wandered, only Charles, starting up, dealt him a blow which flung him back, showing that that shapely shoulder had much muscularity.

‘Carlotta!’ hissed Louis, in a temper.

‘Idiot!’ replied the peeress, showing her brilliant teeth; for it was the banker’s consort. Why did he go trout-fishing to rest his mind?

‘I’ll stand no more of it,’ said Louis, frowning.

Carlotta hummed the end of a favourite opera tune, beating time with her forefinger in the air like a leader of a band.

“Such is your old coquette, who can’t say No

And won’t say Yes, and keeps you in an offing

On a lee shore till it begins to blow—

Then sees your heart wreck’d with an inward scoff-  
ing.”

Not that Louis had much of a heart; but



he had a little feeling, and she had just been demolishing his exquisite breakfast, for the preparation of which he deserved some trifling reward.

‘It’s that fellow Noel,’ sneered Louis.

‘Yes, it’s that fellow Noel,’ smiled Carlotta.

‘I’ll kick his—’

‘No, you won’t.’

‘With a face like brickdust, two teeth gone, a slit nose, and a hole in his ear!’

‘*Mon brave!*’

‘D—n!’

Silence, save the peeress’s low hum. Suddenly she started, picked up her hat and cane.

‘Send me round this vase,’ she said, pointing to the one on which her hat had hung.

‘I sha’n’t,’ said Louis snappishly, like a child deprived of its plaything.

There was a sound of a smash, and the fragments flew about the room. Carlotta had sent her cane through it.

‘Ta-ta!’

‘I’ll never speak to you again.’

‘O yes, my dear, you’ll be round in the evening.’

She was gone. Louis, listening to her boots upon the stairs, swore to himself that she was right; he should be there in the evening, quarrel as they might. As for Noel, he reflected that Carlotta could never find a man she would trust like him. He smiled as he thought of this; she would never dare it with another. How came she, then, to dare it with him? The thought filled him with inexpressible satisfaction. The high and haughty peeress, the woman of the world, had descended to this for him! It filled him with a sense of his own personal charms. He lit a cigar. He had not forgotten Noel, nor forgiven Carlotta her flirtation with that battered warrior; but a feeling had arisen in his mind that he was quite capable of dealing with them both, and it would go hard if he could not turn this very detestable Noel to some purpose of utility in the end.



## CHAPTER VIII.

IF you want to feel yourself a unit, a poor, solitary, wandering iota of humanity, to realise your impotent individuality, go to one of those enormous hotels which grace, or disgrace, the termini of the chief railways in London. There is a crowd on the platform, and you are nobody very particular amongst them; but that is distinction itself compared to what will follow a daring plunge into the wilderness waiting to swallow you up. The hurrying crowd of travellers, busied in getting tickets, labelling their luggage (when will the nuisance of luggage be abated?), discussing the probable time of starting, and driving the guards wild with reiterated questions,—all these are too much occupied to notice *you*. Whether your necktie be a hair's breadth too much on one side, or accurately placed with

compass and ruler, matters very little. No one notices; none think of anything but themselves. But there is a certain feeling of a common humanity; a degree of common interest makes the crowd akin. One is not quite alone here. Open those great glass doors and once pass within, and you are absolutely, incontrovertibly 'nobody.' Instead of 'Railway Hotel,' they should write over them, 'Yourselves abandon, ye who enter here.' Two grand porters in scarlet and black, with lace upon their coats, approach you in state, and inquire if there is any luggage. If the reply is no, you instantly fall fifty per cent in their estimation. No gentleman could possibly travel without luggage; only a rambling idiot, only a fellow who makes a convenience of our hotel for one night, a mere nobody. They fall back disgusted, and a gentleman clad in the highest perfection of the tailor's art, whom you take to be at least the Austrian ambassador staying here a day or two, and to whom you involuntarily bow, glides up and asks, with a

slightly foreign accent, if you would like to see your room, to dress before dinner? Or would you like to go to the coffee-room, or any of the public rooms? (accent again.) You feel that if you say the coffee-room or the smoking-room, you will be looked down upon as still more a nobody; so you say, 'My room, certainly,' with as grand an air as you can manage, though what on earth you have to do when you get to it you can't conceive. The gentleman then makes out a ticket, on which your name and address are entered, and with a graceful wave of the hand directs you towards an iron door. In amazement, not unmixed with terror, you behold an octagon-shaped chamber, lighted up within, through the bars of this iron door. In the moment you pause you observe that the iron-work is curiously carved or hammered out in a mediæval design, which word carries you back to the days of torture and dungeons, and you fancy you behold the dungeon. There is a man in uniform within, who holds a rope in one hand, and glares at you malig-

nantly. This is, no doubt, the executioner. But the door swings open, some extraordinary gibberish issues from the lips of your gentleman-waiter, and you step in, in very dread lest he should see you were a mere parvenu, and unused to this sort of thing. In an instant the floor rises up beneath you like the deck of a ship at sea, the iron door passes out of sight, and nothing remains but the man who pulls hard at the rope. Before you can speak another iron door appears, and behind there stands a woman, say rather a lady, smartly dressed. The door opens, you step out; the executioner brands you in a loud voice as 'No. 70, Floor Three,' and you feel a convicted felon on the way to your cell. The lady marches before, and you follow, shrinking every moment into a meaner wretch. The corridor is broad enough to admit the whole of your house, and nearly high enough, and the floor is carpeted with what you take to be red velvet. Glancing back you see it extends into the illimitable distance—empty, vast, noiseless. There is not a soul but you—



only in the extremest dimmest distance there flit to and fro a few vague shadowy figures. After walking a quarter of a mile a door is opened, your lady lights your gas, and this is your room. It is as large as your dining-room, and rather more lofty. The bedstead of brass is hung with magnificent crimson curtains; the furniture is solid oak, plain oak; the very footstool is large, grand, covered with red velvet. Reverently you look round, and know not where to sit, or indeed what to do with yourself. After a while, in the belief that it is incumbent upon you to do something, you feebly take out your Bradshaw and place it on the mantelpiece, as a sign that you are in possession. Then you sit down and gaze vacantly at the paper on the walls, and wait till you think you have 'seen your room' long enough—it is important not to commit a solecism. Next comes the search for the coffee-room. You debate whether you had better ring the bell and ask the chambermaid the way, or whether it will be more *au fait* to walk boldly out and venture, as Ulysses

did, out into the waste, not of water, but of carpet:

‘It may be we shall find the happy Isles,  
And see the great Achilles whom we knew.’

Very gently you open the door and peep like a criminal down the gallery—an ocean of unending space. No, you will ring the bell—but where is it? Evidently there is no bell. So at last out you venture, and after rambling hither and thither in this silent and enormous hall, and passing two or three waiters, who take not the slightest notice of you, you at last run right against your ‘lady,’ and have to ask her the way. ‘Why did you not ring, sir?’ ‘There was no bell.’ ‘O yes, sir, there is—by the bed. Press on the knob.’ In a crushed state, miserable, wretched, feeling like a grain of sand under the base of the Pyramid, you crawl down three flights of stairs, swallow your coffee in a melancholy mood, and go to bed at ten. Sure enough there is the ivory knob by the bed-head—an electric bell. But you console yourself that you will

sleep well—the bed at least is as clean and sweet as your own at home. In repose you will forget all. No. You doze off, it may be, an hour or two hours; you wake up in the belief that the last day has come, that the trump of the archangel has been blown, and all the thunders of heaven are let loose. You listen, awe-struck. Roar succeeds to roar, boom succeeds to boom—now dying away, now rising again, now sustained, never entirely gone—one long heavy roll of ceaseless artillery. Your heart beats violently, and you expect every moment to hear voices shouting ‘Fire!’ ‘Murder!’ ‘Thieves!’ or ‘Earthquake!’ But there is not a step, not a voice; nothing but boom, boom, boom, boom! You notice that a light comes in through the glass over your door; the gas then is gently burning in the gallery. This somewhat calms you. But again you think that an earthquake is taking place—that all the waiters have fled and left you to your fate; you will never get out of that labyrinth of passages. Fly! Make the attempt; stay not for trousers or

vest. At last you remember that you are in a railway hotel. It must be the trains underneath; the heavy luggage trains coming in at night with meat and corn and coal and stores. Gods, what trains too! What chopped-up mountains they must be carrying to make this enormous building vibrate as it does! You listen till your ears ache with the sound. An insane desire comes over you to rise and dress, and seek some quiet and small private hotel, even some commercial establishment—anything away from this terrible vastness, this void which crushes you, this boom which rolls over you like huge waves. At last, wearied out, you sleep.

What I was going to say when I began this chapter was—Have hotels any conscience? This is not meant to refer either to the price of the wines, or the fees to the waiters, or even to the fleas, or the long bills. Neither does it apply to railway hotels, which, by the exigencies of their position, have no means of knowing anything of their visitors, for good or bad.

But there is such a thing as a Divorce Court; and whenever a case comes on of sufficient interest to be fully reported, the sin is always charged on the hotel. Captain So-and-so comes to such and such an hotel with somebody else's wife; and there they lived very comfortably, and nobody ever thought of anything wrong. Now have hotels any conscience? Why do they permit such things as these? why do they pander to vice? Surely after all the experience the people who keep them must have gained, they must be able to tell in a moment if anything is wrong. But up drive a gentleman and a lady, both well dressed, with plenty of luggage—that's the grand point; obviously they mean to stay, and obviously they have plenty of money. The lady may have a ring on, or she may not; or the chambermaid may note that the linen is marked with two different names, or what not. But here the reverse is true of the old proverb—this is the exception to Solomon's remark; the walls here have no ears. As the newspapers say,

‘improper familiarities’ took place at ‘an hotel.’ Conscience-stricken hotels, how they must wince at these exposures!

The fellow knew how to dine, at all events. The waiter saw that, and attended on him the more obsequiously. Moreover, he did not confine himself to one wine or two—he had the right wine at the right moment, and he only drank a glass or two of each. And she? She was very timid at first, and only trifled with her plate; but after a while the potent champagne, taken in ever such small quantities, rose up in the pretty little head, and then the eyes began to lift themselves to his face and to sparkle, and the conversation began—the which, of course, the waiter took good care not to hear, not he. Half-a-sovereign as a fee for serving at a dinner was not got every day; he would take precious good care nobody disturbed them! So he said to his sub. he would take good care nobody went in, unless specially rung for. O, the wickedness of the world!

There was nothing so very bad after all



in a young man of five-and-twenty treating a full-blown lady—quite able to take care of herself, as far as forty-five years went—to a really good dinner. Only it was the incongruity ; highly incongruous—nothing more.

Virgil, in the *Bucolics* or *Georgics*, or somewhere (it is vulgar to quote correctly), has a beautiful description of the fierce and passionate love that animated the horses which lived in his days. The whole passage must be read to be appreciated. There were times when the very abundance of this tenderness carried them to excesses.

Smothered fires must burst out somewhere and at some time. A hayrick, if fired near the ground, will smoulder for days before it bursts into flame. Modern society supposes the existence of thousands of human creatures—fairly well fed, well dressed, moderately handsome, or at least not positively bad looking—but who, having the misfortune to be ladies, are supposed to have no feelings. They have every appendage for the production of sensation, and every organ perfect—

they have eyes and nose and ears and hands, &c.—but they are supposed to have no feelings at all. Some of them keep schools, hundreds go out as governesses, hundreds dawdle about at home or with their relations. On the aggregate there must be some hundreds of thousands of them. Nobody will marry them ; they have no money. They are not superlatively good looking ; most of them are well bred and educated, and have ladylike manners—but that counts for nothing. Fellows may admire, even love, but they will not marry. No fellow will marry except for money ; this they learn pretty speedily. No one boxes their ears physically ; but their ears, poor girls, are morally boxed all their lives—especially by their employers, their mistresses, and their richer relations who have to keep them. They are snubbed for ever ; toned down ; used as dummies to heighten the contrast ; trodden on. They have no feeling. They are made to bitterly understand the value of money by daily teaching of their own value-

lessness. In the course of years all this reacts upon them, and they, too, resolve never to marry except for money. This is as it should be; the commercial spirit should be introduced into everything—into agriculture and matrimony. As they cannot marry, what are they to do? Do nothing, says modern society; feel nothing; be 0's—ciphers. No one will ever put a permanent unit against them.

This is all very well, and very proper and decorous. Only one thing is left out of sight and quite forgotten. This is Nature. Nature is of no account, 'tis true, nowadays; nobody ever thinks of Nature, or natural things or affections either, for the matter of that. The railways stretch all over the country, and bind Nature down in an iron web. The artificial laws of society stretch over the human heart and hold it down. There are dangerous appearances, though, sometimes of a certain amount of heaving and throbbing underneath. Some socialist physicians think the corset ought to be loosened a little. They

talked of introducing a Bill into the House of Commons legalising marriage for a limited period, for three or four years, or seven, as the parties liked ; on the expiration of which time they might renew the lease—if they wished. They thought this would relieve the throbbing hearts that throb in vain.

But Exeter Hall ! These three words are a paragraph in themselves. Nothing need be added to them.

As we said before, smouldering fires will burst out in the end. Now in all these thousands of female bosoms without feelings there must of necessity be one or two, just a berry or so on the topmost branch, who *do* possess feelings, and very fiery Cleopatra-like ones likewise. Screwed down, constrained, restrained, chained, bound up, trodden on, snubbed, still Maud, at five-and-forty, retained some little beauty of a kind, and still the smouldering fire in her burnt and smouldered. Poor wretch, what an existence hers had been ! A galley slave's were preferable, for galley slaves can at least *swear*—which is

a relief, though so awfully wicked. But a governess, compelled to spend fifty out of her sixty pounds per annum in dress to appear tolerably decent in a drawing-room, must not swear. Such had Maud been from her youth up. Poor wretch!

At last the fire burst out, as it was bound to do before she died, and all the worse, ay, ten times, a thousand times worse, for this quarter of a century of suppression. Her eyes had been opened to a safe way of enjoying mischief by her present mistress's nephew, Victor Knoyle, Esq. Nominally she was taking her holidays, with a distant relation far away on the western shores of Scotland. Really and truly she was dining at an hotel in the heart of London, not three miles from her employer's door, and with that employer's nephew. O, crime beyond forgiveness, unpardonable sin! Poor Maud! It was, perhaps, bad for you that Victor was somewhat of a genius. He had ideas; he had shown her one or two of these. He had made a discovery—somehow he managed to

convey it to her. It was a safe way of indulging mischief.

So they drank the champagne, and laughed and talked and joked, and the world moved on around them, and London rushed and surged and roared unheard and unheeded. She was indulging in a little innocent masculine society *all to herself*—a thing for which she had parched and burnt for a quarter of a century. How many thousands are longing for the same thing at this hour! There is a lesson in this book, or rather there will be before the end is reached. But Exeter Hall!

Victor did not love her—she knew that; but he was *kind*. He did not cheat himself and his conscience by making himself believe that he loved her—she was too old. He had not the excuse of an all-absorbing love; but he felt an indescribable pleasure in placing food before this famished creature—for famished she was for a *little* love, a little tenderness. And it was quite safe; she would receive no harm; her reputation would



remain intact. He had arranged to utilise his discovery if necessary.

They drank more champagne, and were very happy. It was such a relief to Maud. She sighed in the midst of her joy—a long-drawn sigh, as an invalid does when first taken out of the sick-chamber into the fresh air.





## CHAPTER IX.

HORTON KNOYLE'S brother Charles fell in love with Carlotta at the same time that he did. Carlotta chose Horton for several very good reasons. Firstly, because Horton was richer by far ; secondly, because he had a fashionable and distinguished connection ; thirdly, because he was younger ; and lastly, because Charles had been previously married and was a widower with two young sons. There was no question, no thought at all, as to which loved her most. It was a pro and con, a debit and credit, account in her mind. Horton had the largest amount of credit. Charles never ceased to love her, and when he died, which he did about ten years ago, his will was so ordered that in the event of his sons dying without children, the property, some 95,000*l.*, went to Carlotta. Now Horton

was trustee and guardian to these young men, Victor and Francis, neither of whom could touch a penny of their fortune till they were twenty-five. Curiously enough he very carefully kept them out of the way and influence of their aunt Carlotta. One would have thought that a man busied with the affairs of nations would have been glad of a little assistance in training these charges ; but no, he studiously secluded them from her. She was nothing loth, she had no desire to cumber herself with any concerns of theirs. So the two boys were sent to school, and finally to a private tutor's in a distant part of Sussex, where they remained. Horton would not allow them to go to college lest they should contract bad habits. He had no children of his own, and it seemed as if he was more than fidgety over these two boys, his nephews, and probably inheritors of his enormous wealth. Therefore they remained at the clergyman's in Sussex ; strictly, carefully trained in the ways of virtue, and never so much as allowed to imagine the existence

of vice. Even smoking, though not absolutely prohibited, was discouraged. They were required to be indoors at ten at latest. They were restricted to twenty pounds per quarter pocket-money; a mere nothing to young men from whom a knowledge of the wealth awaiting them some day could not be entirely concealed. Victor, the eldest, was turbulent and restless; Francis, the second, was milder and feebler, more easily made good. There existed between them the strongest affection and friendship. Victor had written letter after letter to his uncle begging to be permitted to enter college, or even to be placed in the counting-house, anything but the monotonous mildness, the feeble girlish existence under the charge of an aged clergyman, as if they were weak in the intellect. He never got a reply. Then he made various plans of escape; but the question always came, what could he do without money? So the time went on till Victor was twenty-two and Francis twenty-one. Then a violent fit of restlessness seized

Victor, and he persuaded Francis to join him despite of the other's scruples. If they could not permanently escape, they could at least have a month or two of 'lark' in France. Victor's plan was to wait till their next quarter's allowance came, and then bolt. This they did without the slightest trouble. They went to London, and from there started for Paris *viâ* Dover. In the train they fell in with half-a-dozen very agreeable fellows, who produced some champagne and a pack of cards. Now if there was one thing more severely forbidden at the tutor's than another it was every form of gambling. In consequence it had irresistible attractions—even the mild and good Francis could not help it. They played the whole journey, and arrived at Dover station with one pound ten out of forty pounds with which they started. The half-a-dozen agreeable gentlemen were in fact card-sharpers, and had an easy prey. Francis, in an agony of remorse, was for returning on foot with that small sum of thirty shillings, begging pardon, and being reinstated. Victor

would hear of no such thing—he had started to see France, and see France he would. Half by threat and half by ridicule he overcame Francis's reluctance, and they went to a pawnbroker's to pawn their watches. Just as they entered the shop two men pounced on them and held them fast. They were detectives in plain clothes. A great jewel robbery had been recently committed. Francis turned pale, not so much with affright as with shame. Victor laughed, and went willingly to the superintendent of police. A few questions from him elicited the fact that they were no thieves, and they were allowed their liberty. Francis pleaded hard to return. Victor shook him and called him a milksop. He boldly marched back to the pawn-shop and got five pounds on their watches, about one-sixth of their value. Then they inquired about the steamer—the last had been gone about two hours ; there was no other boat that night. Nothing daunted, Victor dragged Francis down to the beach, and hired a sailing boat, in which they actually crossed the Channel,



sick as dogs, and got into Calais about one in the morning. The cash left, after paying the boatman, was about two pounds. They slept at a cabaret, where the chambermaid and maid-of-all-work laughed in their faces when they complained of the extreme narrowness of the bed, and demanded four francs overnight. Next morning they started to walk to Paris. They got over four hours on one of those straight and endless military roads with the poplars on each side, and then, tired and weary and hungry, looked round in vain for refreshments. A peasant at his dinner saw them staring about, and immediately sprang up and rushed out to offer his assistance. They asked for dinner; he took them in; they found the soup admirable, and the good man grateful for the five-franc piece they gave him. Had it been an English labourer's cottage they would have starved on sour cheese and bread. Here they feasted on delicious soup, and set out strong and refreshed. But that was not all. Jacques assured them that they were not on the

straight road to Paris—monsieur must cross the country to the right, and get into the Abbeville track; that would save twenty miles. He would show them. They followed his directions, and left the hard and beaten road. They walked on briskly for a couple of hours. The track had dwindled down now to a bridle-path; then it enlarged into a lane; presently it fell to a foot-path, and they were again tired and hungry. There was nothing in sight but ploughed fields and a few willow-trees. A hundred yards farther on and the foot-path ended in a sandy field with a few bushes of furze. Pushing on through this they entered a common minus a road or path at all. This was encouraging at four in the afternoon and the clouds threatening rain. It was late in the autumn, Michaelmas, and the sun was getting low. The prospect was anything but cheering. Poor Francis was in misery. His feet were blistered, and his conscience pricked him. This was the reward of wrong-doing. They should have to spend a night in the open air.

Exhausted, at last they sat down under a low wall. Victor was still strong and ready to march, but feebler Francis was completely done up. All they could do was to sit still and bewail their fate, which was night and damp shirts, as the black cloud yonder prophesied but too plainly.

While they were sitting here disconsolately they became conscious of a most singular and unaccountable noise. It was not the crowing of cocks and hens, nor the mew-ing of cats, nor the barking and yelping of puppies, and yet it seemed like the first attempt at language by the young of some animal. Neither of them could make it out. Francis had a weakness for pets, and he had kept most animals, and he was quite sure it was none of them. A most extraordinary and remarkable row—such a cackling, and crow-ing, and yelping, and shrill crying. Nothing like it ever assailed mortal ears before. They listened for some time, making all sorts of conjectures. Then Victor resolved to penetrate the obscurity, to ‘thrust the mystery

carte and tierce.' Francis begged him to remember that there were wolves in France even now; those might be the cries of the cubs. Victor laughed him to scorn, and sprang over the wall. He disappeared round a thicket, and came back in ten minutes shaking with laughter. 'What fools we have been!' he said; 'come and see.' Rather unwillingly Francis got over the wall and limped after him. Victor took him round the thicket, and pointed. It was a curious spectacle.

There was a large rambling house, tiled and rather dreary looking, though pierced with innumerable windows. In front of it, and reaching almost to their feet, was a broad lawn closely mown and well kept. On this lawn about one hundred babies, at the lowest calculation, were tumbling, walking, jumping, fighting, scratching, yelling, and generally amusing themselves with true infant glee. Two or three women were slowly walking up and down side paths, busily knitting as they went. This was the cause of the noise

which had alarmed them. No wonder they could not make it out. They watched the scene for a few minutes. Presently a bell rang, and as if by magic all the troop began to toddle towards the house, in which one and all disappeared.

‘Well,’ said Victor, ‘I’ll go back now, Francis, if you want; if we go a thousand miles we shall never beat this.’

But Francis was too footsore to attempt further walking. What was to be done? There was no other house within sight; clearly they must apply here for lodging and refreshment. Finally they walked round to the front door and hammered at the knocker. A servant took them into a well-furnished parlour, where in a minute or two ‘monsieur’ made his appearance. It was evident on his face that he was very much astonished at their appearance at his mansion, and that he did not know what to make of them; but he was extremely polite, and soon perceiving that they were evidently young men of position, possibly of wealth, he began to smell out

a way in which they might be profitable. So he begged them to accept a bed and to partake of supper, and generally to make themselves at home. They did not like the look of the fellow, but there was no other alternative, for by this time the rain was pouring down in torrents. 'At least,' said Victor, when they were alone upstairs, 'I've got a penknife, and they can't rob us of much, at all events.'

'Monsieur' brought out some wine after supper. Victor, always bold and inquiring, asked outright what was the meaning of all these children, despite Francis's frantic signs to him to hold his tongue and make as if they were quite ignorant. 'Monsieur' was delighted to give any information—he would be proud to show them over his establishment. He assured them upon his faith and his God that his beds were perfectly clean and wholesome, and his system humane in the extreme. *They* were well fed, well dressed, well cared for by good nurses; what more did they want? If anything, they had



a good garden to play in; and when they grew bigger—

‘But how the devil do they get here?’ burst in Victor, interrupting the torrent of loquacity.

Ah, that was a good joke. Monsieur was really too good—and a young man too (meant to be a wicked joke). It was a form of *maladie Anglaise*.

‘You don’t mean to say these infants are English?’

Ma foi, but they were though, every single one of them.

‘And how the deuce do they get here, and whom do they belong to?’

‘Well, they arrived in the world in various vague ways.’

But a hint was enough; he need say no more. They were well cared for, and their papas and mammas could move in good society, and no one the wiser. *Que voulez-vous?* They had an agency in London. Monsieur could see it in the daily papers. Here was a copy.

Victor read: 'Private agency, No. — T— Road. Charges moderate. Strict confidence. No inquiries.'

Francis, sickened at this horrible recital of cold-blooded wickedness, nudged Victor to silence; but Victor would not till he had mastered the whole detestable system in its details.

Monsieur felt himself a benefactor to his species—it made him feel so large-hearted and benevolent to see these tiny creatures luxuriating in his abode. Perhaps another day his guests would recommend him; perhaps—

They slept there that night. In the morning they went back to Calais, and reached the tutor's with sixpence left. The establishment they had discovered was kept a profound secret between them.

Francis tried to forget all about it. Not so Victor. He pondered. He was a young man of ideas. He evolved a plan out of this discovery.

At this date he was free—he was twenty.

five—he had come into his share of the ninety-five thousand pounds under certain restrictions. Francis had another year to wait; but they permitted him to live with his brother in chambers in Curzon-street.

Victor had already applied his idea. He had succeeded in persuading Maud into the belief that it was an accurate and practicable one.

Maud was Carlotta's lady housekeeper—this was her holiday time. She had risen to be a lady housekeeper after five-and-twenty years of governess life.





## CHAPTER X.

LOUIS began to hate Heloise; not passively and negatively, but actively. She was a tie upon him; but it was not that altogether. It was the consciousness that her whole life and nature was a reflection upon *his*. Her purity and truth and innocence were a slur upon him and his ways. He hated her. The galling knowledge that he could not escape from the fetters binding him to her added to his passion. He considered how he could get rid of her. There were but two methods, death or divorce. He could murder her, but he gnashed his teeth as he thought that it was out of his power to divorce her. He could kill her—he would not have hesitated at that. A man who had associated with all the blackguards in Europe, and with all the rowdies of America, could not be supposed to possess any terrors of conscience. He thought over

the idea thoroughly, and dismissed it as impracticable. There were so many obstacles in the way in this country of civilisation. He believed he could do it easily enough, and escape detection long enough to enable him to get abroad and hide. But that was not what he wanted. Such means as that would defeat the end in view. He wanted to remain in England. He had no idea of being hunted over the earth like a human hare—and he reflected that the world was so small nowadays. The electric telegraph had spanned the globe, and brought California and Australia within easy communication. The express train and the fast steamer had so narrowed the expanse between one country and another, that in point of fact the space of the world contracted day by day. It was so wretchedly small. There was no place a man could get to where he could not be got at in a very little time. But apart from that he did not wish to leave the society he usually moved in.

No. So far as he could see at present it

would not pay him to murder Heloise. This man calmly worked out this conclusion, as he smoked a cigarette, much as he would have worked out a monetary calculation as to the probable rise or fall of the funds. He was so utterly devoid of conscience that it never occurred to him to review the extreme wickedness of his reflections. There are those who may doubt that such a state of mind as this can possibly exist. They may say that the most hardened criminal feels remorse at times. It is possible that the most hardened criminal does, because such men are generally very ill educated and consequently superstitious. But Louis was highly educated, and superstition had no terrors for him. Moreover he had lived all his life in a groove corresponding to what his nature considered rational; in other words he had been 'faithful to the logic of his type' all his life. Therefore he felt no prick of conscience. He was, on the contrary, rather disgusted with the conclusion he came to. It would not pay to kill Heloise.



There only remained the alternative of divorce. So soon as he thought of that the remembrance of her truth and purity rose up and lashed him into a state of perfect fury. He had no grounds for a divorce. He could find no blame with her. She was so completely innocent, that even his evil mind could find no fault with her. There was not the slightest handle to lay hold of. But Louis, with all his temper, was a reflective man, and a philosopher after his kind. He reflected that if a handle did not exist, perhaps it was possible to make one. He reflected that even the purest and noblest minds are not always proof against temptation. He argued that in a certain 'set' there was no game considered so perfectly open and to afford such sport as a young married lady possessed of superior personal attractions. Suppose he threw her open to the efforts of these noble huntsmen? He growled as he remembered that Heloise was not made of the sort of stuff to fall a victim to their attentions. But fall a victim she should. He, her husband, would ruin her, and then

out of that ruin, disgrace, and shame obtain his freedom. This was a very pretty plan; the only difficulty was to put it into practice. Where was he to obtain the tempter? Where could he find a man of sufficient attractions or sufficient subtlety to reduce Heloise from her normal path into one of misery and disgrace? He thought over every person of his acquaintance, and was compelled to own that there was none that he knew of. Still he believed in the infinite possibilities of time. Such a man would turn up if only he watched and waited. Meantime he must endure the bondage. This chafed and irritated him to an unendurable degree. As it was entirely his own fault, as he had himself for months studiously endeavoured by all the means in his power to induce Heloise to marry him, and as he had therefore no one to blame but himself, it followed as a matter of course that he must find some one else to wreak his rage and ill-temper on. Off he went to Carlotta.

That magnificent tigress received him with a haughty toss of the head.

‘It was your cursed fault,’ he began; ‘you persuaded me to marry her.’

She only sneered.

‘You said it would allow us to be together more frequently, and with less suspicion. Who could find fault with the visits of a brother-in-law? She was to be our shield, under cover of which we—’

‘We! You mean yourself.’

Louis stamped his foot with rage.

‘Yes, *we*!’ he reiterated. ‘That *we* might enjoy an unfettered intercourse without fear of that fellow Horton—’

‘In order that *you* might have the pleasure of contributing to my gratification, I certainly did favour your marriage with Heloise.’

‘O, you did, did you? Really how kind, how considerate! Then *my* pleasure was of no account?’

‘Certainly not; *you* never entered into my calculation. Poor fellow! did he quarrel with his toy? Should have another—he should, dear little boy!’

‘You are an unnatural monster!’

‘Am I really? How charming—a new sensation! You have forgotten falling in love with baby-face, I suppose? Who was it followed her about like a puppy at her heels? Who was it hung on her lips and drank her lisping words? Who rode with her? danced with her? sang with her? Who asked my assistance to secure her?’

Carlotta’s eyes flashed, and her bosom heaved, as she hissed out her words.

‘You double-dyed traitor! I help you! yes, I helped you! I persuaded Heloise, I urged Pierce into accepting you. I hushed up those ugly tales that floated about of your doings in order that you might marry my sister, that, as I foresaw, you might hate her and writhe under her yoke, and come to me and beg a little of my love. Psha! you mean-spirited fool, I spurn you!’

Louis looked wildly about him for a few minutes, as if he had been struck by apoplexy, and then rushed out. He found his way home mechanically. He met Heloise as he passed

through the dining-room, for it was close upon six o'clock. Alarmed at his livid face, she started and asked if he was ill.

‘Go to the devil!’ was his reply as he struck her full in the face with his clenched hand; and she fell senseless on the carpet. The sound of her fall brought him to himself; he seized the water on the table and dashed some in her face, sneering as he observed the blood issuing from her cut lip. He rang the bell, and told the servants that their mistress had had a fit; let them carry her up-stairs, and send for Georgiana Knogle, he added. ‘Let her console her,’ he said to himself as he went up-stairs. ‘A new argument for her precious theories. What a brute they will make me out! Stay!’ An idea struck him and he paused upon the stairs. She might get a divorce from him as much as he from her if he misbehaved himself—that was a new idea—for cruelty, unfaithfulness, desertion. Very good; he would give her plenty of chances. This blow would make a good beginning. He dressed carefully for dinner, and had it all by himself in state, a

thing he rarely ever did. He heard that Georgiana had arrived. 'Now the folly will begin,' he said to himself. He called for his favourite wine, and sipped it with gusto. He would call on Carlotta again in the evening—not before nine. He would tell her of the little incident, it would amuse her. He drank more wine. The magnificent vixen, she was jealous, ha, ha! More wine. Jealous of his love for Heloise in that summer at Avon-bourne. She was a splendid woman—a grand creature—free of all those girlish airs and prejudices. Jealous of him—that was consoling. She would never discard him. It revived his spirits. The extraordinary command the tiger had over her feelings—to actually encourage him to marry her sister, to do all in her power to accelerate the match, and then to calmly wait for the inevitable result—for the discord, and the cruelty, and unfaithfulness. He chuckled as he thought of it. There was no one like Carlotta. A grand creature. He admired her subtlety. A boa-constrictor in female form. What a pleasure there was in



playing with the tigress! He would go and see her again in an hour or two.

Just then the footman entered, bringing in a telegram. Louis tore it open. It ran thus:

‘*Horton Knoyle, Grand Hôtel, Paris, to Louis Fontenoy, No. — G——square, London.*

‘Come over at once. Shebang has arrived.’

Louis sprang up, seized his hat, called a cab, and drove to the London, Chatham, and Dover. The tidal train for the night steamer was at the platform with steam up. He took his ticket, and was *en route* in five minutes.

In America, when a man by the force of his character takes a certain amount of lead among his neighbours, they call him ‘General,’ or leader, just as in the olden time the head of a marauding expedition was called *dux bel-lorum*—the duke or leader of battle.

‘General’ Shebang was sitting with Horton Knoyle, Esq., financier, in the private apartments of the latter at the Grand Hôtel. They were in deep and earnest conversation. Shebang was no vulgar Yankee. He was a

polished and polite gentleman. The only sign of the American was his boots. Somehow no foreigner can ever wear thoroughly English boots, try how he will.

Louis's theory was that you should never depend upon your friends to have dinner, or supper, or refreshment, or comfort of any kind, waiting for you. This was what vulgar people did. They imagined that their friends were so eagerly awaiting their arrival, that they had killed and cooked the fatted calf, and got everything ready and pleasant. When these ignorant fools arrived—tired, weary, dusty—they found their friends cool, calm, easy, and in a state of unostentatious repose, without a room ready, or anything eatable or drinkable. The man of the world took care of himself *en route*. He refreshed his inner man. He washed and dressed at the last railway station or hotel. He had his boots cleaned, and the dust removed. Thus he came in at the end of his journey as fresh, as presentable in every way, as comfortable, as if he only lived half a mile off. So Louis came into the Grand Hôtel

ready for instant conversation. It was seven o'clock in the morning, but he had telegraphed from Calais that he was coming, and Knoyle was waiting for him, and *waiting alone*.

'Shebang is asleep,' said Knoyle immediately they had shaken hands. 'At least I have ascertained he is in his room. He will not rise till ten—we have three hours at least. You had better depart before he rises, for *they* are keen.'

'Very keen,' replied Louis. 'Now what does he propose?'

'He wants a million,' said Horton slowly, as if reflecting on Shebang's proposals. 'He wants a million in cash, and half of it at once. To guarantee that million, he and ninety-nine other gentlemen will mortgage their estates in Carolina, Alabama, and Louisiana, each to the extent of five thousand pounds. That would cover five hundred thousand pounds. They will each guarantee one thousand pounds per annum, or one hundred thousand pounds, *i.e.* interest at the rate of twenty per cent. The other half-million I am to guarantee shall be

forthcoming if they succeed in holding the line west of the Mississippi for three months; and if it is not forthcoming, then I forfeit my mortgages and interest. So that in point of fact I must hold the other five hundred thousand pounds ready in the bank, and so lose interest upon it. This reduces the interest they pay me to ten per cent. On final success the draft agreement (I will show it to you in a minute) provides that I take the sole monopoly of cotton exports for five years, and they repay me in full, which, according to their calculation, ought to give me a million over my outlay. Now the question is, can these men be trusted? We have conversed on this matter before. I have sent for you now to have your final opinion. Also I want your opinion on the condition of the public mind in the States. I know you are well acquainted with the inner life of the cities' (there was a slight accent of a sneer in the remark, but so slight as to be barely perceptible). 'These men, you see, have estates—enormous estates—but they have no ready money, the last war

took it all—there's where they are beaten. The question is, if they had the ready money, and spent it judiciously, is their propaganda likely to meet with popular favour south and west ?'

'Of this I am quite certain,' replied Louis : 'the South, as it rises from the effects of the war, and regains its old wealth and political coherence, has, and still further will, unite itself with the vigorous and thriving West. Hitherto all the traffic—the enormous goods and grain traffic—of the West has passed through the Northern States, and been shipped at Northern ports ; it was carried on Northern lines, built by Northern enterprise. But the companies, exhilarated at the success of the North in the war, and confident of a monopoly, have so risen their charges for transit, that the cost of carriage clogs the enterprise of the Western people. Consequently there exists the bitterest animosity against them and against the Legislature, which, Northern in its sympathies, will afford no redress. Hence the West gravitates hourly

towards the South, and the South, rising again, seeks an ally in the West. The movement is national in its magnitude, but hitherto it has been under the surface. If a leader or band of leaders sprang up, without doubt both South and West would rise; and the train could easily be fired down South by exciting the race-hatred of whites to blacks.'

'Shebang,' said Horton, 'thinks that Cuba would join the South, with the idea of curbing the North, and retaining slavery. There is a grandeur about the scheme of uniting the South and West in a great autonomic republic exceedingly captivating to my mind. And Europe is so overdone, there is no market for money. The old monarchs have borrowed and borrowed, till they are waist-deep in debt; their loans are merely makeshifts to pay the coupons on old debts. I want something new, fresh, with a prospect of vigorous extension. Much depends upon the personal character of these gentlemen. You are acquainted with Shebang and the rest or most of them.'

Louis entered into a rapid but graphic



picture of the character and lives of these men. He painted them as they were, and he did not spare their evil traits. On the whole it was satisfactory.

‘But still,’ continued Horton, ‘there remains to be considered the *hands* for the work. What of the men they propose to employ—the agents, the military adventurers? Of what stuff are these made?’

Louis described them as desperate in the extreme. Horton asked if there was not a suspicion of Communism amongst them. Louis admitted that there was.

‘I like a little Communism,’ said Horton thoughtfully. ‘That affair in this Paris did me a great deal of good. The monarchs had got into a way of thinking themselves quite safe; they were growing insolent, they even attempted to drive terms with us capitalists. Fancy that! *Now* they feel their lack of stability—they are courteous, they pay us attention, they take *our* terms. Ah, I am not sure that the establishment of another republic would not make them still more

anxious to retain our good-will. I will not detain you longer—Shebang will be down in ten minutes. Adieu ; remember me to Heloise.’

There was a smile on the lips of both the men as they parted. There was a very different expression when the door closed between them. ‘He *must* suspect, he *must* know something at least,’ reflected Louis, as he walked out into the city of Napoleon. ‘So deep and penetrating a mind cannot but suspect, even if nothing more ; but I am useful to him—he will make no noise, no disturbance, while I play into his hands ; while I increase his wealth with my knowledge I am safe with Carlotta.’

Horton was pondering too. His question was—would Louis deceive him ? Had he a motive, an interest to do so ? Considering the peculiar relations which existed (a spasm of pain passed over his forehead), he hardly thought so. No ; Louis could be trusted not to quarrel with his own interest.

Thus they plotted and schemed and wove their webs, while poor Heloise lay at home in

a darkened room, frenzied with fever, tended by patient loving Georgie. The doctors said her lip—her mobile, beautiful lip—would show a scar to her dying day, even if she rose from the bed of fever. They industriously spread the report that it was a fall in a fit. Georgie reflected upon this ‘little incident,’ as Louis called it, as she sat by the bedside. Was marriage so divine an institution? Could she trust herself even with Neville irrevocably and for ever? It was a deep and an anxious question to her. It almost seemed as if the irresponsible power given to a man by marriage acted as the heat of a conservatory to force up and strengthen the growth of the evil passions of his nature. The sense of irresponsibility seemed to remove all the restraints of society, and all the dormant evil burst out. There appeared to be almost a curse upon it. And poor Horton too, and *that* Carlotta! It was a most sad and serious thing. Could nothing be done to alter this—to evade this terrible fatality attending marriage? How was it possible to amend that institution?



## CHAPTER XI.

LOUIS, by an impulse, when he left Horton did not return at once to England. He took the train almost immediately for Brussels. The air of the Continent, the indefinable influence of the well-remembered architecture, the very sound of the language, acting through old associations, brought up an irresistible desire to visit and confer with his old companions. He slept almost the whole of the journey. He could have gone on at once from Brussels to Antwerp, but he preferred to stay an hour or so for refreshment. Then he started again. It was night when he began to pick his way on foot through the jungle of streets and corners, the convoluted congeries of houses which constitutes the city of Rubens. He had not come to study the works of that great artist. But even in Rubens' day

Antwerp produced that fleshly sensuous style of beauty which is one of its chief, though unacknowledged, attractions in this modern time. Louis strolled leisurely along, and entered a large glass door flaringly illuminated. On the right, as he entered, he saw through the panes of another glass door an enormous room surrounded with sofas of red velvet, upon which a numerous company of handsome and well-dressed ladies were sitting, attended by knots of gentlemen. He passed these attractions, and ascended the staircase, threading a maze of galleries with evident familiarity, till at the end of a narrow corridor lighted by a stained-glass window he was stopped by a gentleman, who extended his arm across the passage. Louis smiled, bowed, and whispered a single word. The arm was withdrawn, a door flung open, and he entered a small apartment, where five or six persons were seated round a table upon which was wine and fruit. It was only a conversation, it was not a consultation night, to Louis's regret. Nevertheless he sat down, neither of the party

taking the slightest notice of him. He helped himself to wine, none of the rest even so much as pausing a moment in their remarks.

‘I do not agree with you,’ said Grousset, a Frenchman; ‘I think London most easily assailable. A city that is mined underneath from one end to the other must always be an easy prey. All that you require is to fire the gas-pipes in twenty different places, and blow it up.’

‘Or,’ continued Pasqui, an Italian, ‘you can obtain access to the sewers, which are enormous in London, and fill them with nitro-glycerine; about five tons’ weight of that substance would throw the city into the air.’

‘Mere nothings to what I would suggest,’ interrupted a Prussian. ‘I would dam up the sewers, and shut off the escape of the solid and liquid sewage into the river. When a certain district, where the occupation of the inhabitants was principally keeping horses for hire—mews I think they call it—was declared infected with some disease, it was ordered that no manure or other refuse should be carted out



of it. The heaps accumulated, and in ten days the whole place was attacked with diarrhœa, which decimated the inhabitants. A hostile fleet has, therefore, simply to dam up the sewers and prevent the outflow of noxious matter; the accumulation of this matter, and the penetration of poisonous gases into the houses, would, in a fortnight, infect the whole metropolis with typhus fever and cholera.'

'A sublime idea, by which slops would conquer heroes,' cried Grousset.

'I would take England with three hundred resolute men,' said Prognowski, a Russian; 'such men, I mean, as Peter the Great commanded, who would throw themselves off a tower into eternity for his pleasure. All you want is three hundred such fellows, and a swift steamer. I see an English firm offers to build a steamer which shall travel twenty-five miles an hour. Where is the cumbrous ram or the swift clipper that could overtake such a vessel as that? Let fifty of the men land on the Isle of Wight, where the English Queen walks

about unattended, and seizing her and one or two of the family, carry them off to the steamer. At the same moment, the two hundred and fifty men, conveyed by train to London, and utterly unnoticed in the vast multitudes who exist there, seize the Bank of England, where thirty million pounds in hard gold are deposited. It would be essential to hang some court official at the yard-arm of the steamer, to enforce the threat of destroying the Royal Family if the two hundred and fifty men in possession of the Bank were not allowed to depart in peaceful procession, carrying with them the stores of bullion in the cellars. The English troops would protect them from the fury of the populace, lest the royal party should suffer. Once on board the steamer with their bullion and away, who could catch them?

‘And where could they go?’ asked Louis with a sneer. ‘What country could they fly to where the telegraph would not anticipate their arrival?’

‘O,’ replied Prognowski, ‘I spoke suppos-

ing some nation was at war with Great Britain. By removing the thirty million pounds in the Bank cellars the backbone of England would be broken; for although her patriot soldiers might possibly fight without pay, it would be impossible to transport them, to concentrate them, or to provide them with provisions without money.'

'The object of destroying England I cannot see,' said an American. 'It is from England that we derive the money which is essential to our projects. If she collapsed, where should we get the necessary funds? Depend upon it, no continental nation will engage in war with Great Britain. They may foam at the mouth, and curse the English, but they know full well that their interest demands that England should be prosperous. What would their governments do without the English capitalist? Who paid the expenses of the French war, thereby liberating French territory and indemnifying the Germans? It was the English capitalist. Who supports the tottering cabinet of Vienna, the conspiracy-

frightened cabinet at St. Petersburg, who props up France, and even keeps Spain from total ruin? The English capitalist. As for Italy, her existence depends upon the London Stock Exchange. England is necessary to the world.'

'Talking of continental politics,' said Grousset, 'I am certain that Bismarck corresponds with the Prince Imperial. The astute old German looks upon the restoration of the Napoleons as a mere question of time. The Prince Imperial and his advisers would be delighted to see Bismarck tighten his reins, and give a check, that he might pose himself as a leader, as the representative of popular indignation. Bismarck wants the Republic destroyed.'

'He must take care, or he will find a republic in Germany spring up under his very feet,' said the Prussian. 'It is just possible that while the war-fever lasts, and men see that leaders are necessary, that they will endure the iron rule of the Government. But let once there be a prospect of peace, and down go king and kaiser, and up goes a re-

public. There is no animosity between the great republican leaders on either side of the Rhine. I know as a fact that the republicans in France are at this moment considering on the draft of an agreement between them and the republicans of the states of the German Empire. That agreement stipulates that in consideration of the return of Alsace and Lorraine, the French shall support the uprising of the German people in favour of a republic.'

'Our society,' said the American, 'requires neither monarchy nor republic. The one is as fatal to our designs and belief as the other. Our one grand fundamental doctrine is the supremacy of natural genius.' ('Hear, hear!' and applause.) 'Now the existence of a monarchy totally deprives genius of its natural supremacy, since the head of the state is hereditary, and the greatest talent cannot elevate the possessor to that position. Now the republic supposes a president who is as frequently elected by the jarring factions of ignorance as from any true ability he possesses; and when

once he fills that place, there is no room for another. What we truly want, then, is neither a monarchy nor a republic ; nor is it precisely the commune. The commune, it is true—the local self-government of innumerable small districts—gives an opportunity to the genius of each district to assert itself, and take its natural preëminence. That is so far good, and what we wish. But there is something further than this. Theoretically, the perfect man needs no government at all. He is his own king, his own lawyer, his own priest, almost his own Deity. He requires no king to command or compel him to obey the laws, because he follows them from his own appreciation of their application to the good of society; no lawyer to expound these laws, or apply them, because he thoroughly understands the spirit of them ; and in such a state equity, and not precedent, supplies the rule of judgment. No priest, because he sees clearly the relation between God and man ; no Deity, because even if God did not exist, so strong is his belief in the beauty of the social relations,



and in the sublime mission of man, he would still remain truthful, upright, grand, and noble, and worthy of immortality, even if there were no such thing as a hereafter. When, through education and the progress of time, every man in this great and populous globe shall arrive at such an elevated state of mind as this, it is evident that no government could be required. Thus, therefore, neither monarchy nor republic nor commune would be required ; but still there must remain a certain degree of difference between men.

‘Men would still be born who possessed a greater share of talent and genius than their friends and the surrounding population. These, without any sign or badge of distinction, or any power of executing their ideas, must still occupy the position of mental leaders of the population, much as in the early days of the Hebrew constitution the prophets, without any legal status, exercised a great influence upon the affairs of that remarkable nation. This, I think, is our doctrine in outline.’ (Applause.)

‘For many years,’ said an old man, who had hitherto been silent, ‘I have revolved in my mind the idea of founding an intellectual priesthood, after the model of the priesthood of Rome, with various degrees of deacon, priest, cure, archdeacon, bishop, archbishop, cardinal, and lastly, a head answering to the Roman pope ; which intellectual priesthood should at once educate the masses, govern them, and afford to the talent and genius of the earth a true and certain method of rising to their natural level : the greatest intellect, the greatest genius taking the position of head or pope.’

‘I differ from you entirely,’ said Grousset, ‘and for simple reasons. The machinery in time would forget the great cause for which it was instituted, and would live for and study itself only, just as the Roman priesthood, originally instituted for the best of ends, finally came to be what we see it now—an order seeking only its own elevation, at the expense of truth and of liberty.’

‘No, I think it much better that we should

remain as we are now,' said the American, 'without organisation properly so called, scattered all over the world. In that very want of organisation our power, which is derived from our originality, exists. And so soon as one of our order succeeds in realising his idea—let it be mechanical, let it be mental or moral, let it be what it may—we one and all, in various quarters of the globe, rush forward to assist and aid him. In the rude and rough press of Western America appear articles praising and glorifying our friend and his attempt; in the civilised cities of Europe books and pamphlets, lectures and meetings, demonstrate the worth of the new prophet who has arisen. We propagate the idea everywhere. We are bound together by an electric sympathy only, but that sympathy is the strongest bond of all.'

'Well,' said Louis, rising to speak, 'I have news for you all. One of our order has succeeded in realising his idea; it will be your duty to hasten to assist him. At this very hour General Shebang and the millionaire at

Paris are exchanging the ratifications of the treaty which secures Shebang a million sterling to unite the South and West in one grand republic !'

A cheer greeted this announcement.

'They ridiculed Napoleon,' said Grousset, 'because he went to war for an idea. The fools ! All the nations of the earth had previously gone to war. For what ? Out of hatred and envy and jealousy—out of prejudice—for varying creeds and religious difference—to revenge imaginary insults, or to add to their own glory and power.

'But Napoleon had neither hatred, envy, or jealousy, or creed, as his animating motive. None of the base passions and the feeble prejudices of the world influenced him. He warred for an idea. It was a grand spectacle ; it was the act of a Genius. It was no wish of his to spill blood, or to kill a single man. But he had an idea ; he had a conception. To carry that idea into execution it was necessary to make war, and he made it. It was the only justifiable war that ever was

made. But it illustrates another side of our doctrine and order. We do not hesitate at blood, or at murder, or at force, or any other act which prejudice calls crime, in order to carry out our idea. Thus Samuel hewed Agag in pieces in cold blood in order to secure the execution of his idea, which was an Israel free from idolatry. Thus, if one of our order divulges our secrets, he is removed by knife or by surer means. To us there is no crime. Crime does not exist to us ; we are above it. It is impossible that our hands should commit it. Our ideas render our actions sacred.'

A slight smile passed over Louis's countenance. His eyes were fixed upon the speaker, studying him with delicious relish. This last sentiment was *caviare* to him. It was exquisite to see men who professed the highest aims, and the deification of the human race, declare that if they imbrued their hands in blood it was no more than as if they had washed them in water. It was a union of the divine with the diabolical which exactly suited his appetite. He left them to their

wine and to their conversation and repaired to his hotel, not without a certain uneasiness in his own mind. There was some danger in belonging to this order. He knew full well that they possessed means of carrying out their threats little dreamt of by those in authority. He knew that no man's life, upon whom their enmity was fixed, was safe for an instant. It was true that at present he was upon excellent terms with them. But he was conscious that in the secret recesses of his own mind a half-formed design had been lingering of late to use them to his own purpose, a use which they might call betrayal. Still he laughed the momentary oppression off, and turned his thoughts upon Carlotta, whom he should see upon the morrow. He sailed next morning straight for London in the steamer.





## CHAPTER XII.

THERE are many of our friends who will gather round us in the first flush of an accident, or of an illness, or of the incidence of misfortune; there are few—very few—who remain after their curiosity is satisfied, and they can say, ‘Well, we have done what we could.’ Even the devoted friend who has nursed us through a desperate illness will leave us as we are getting better, leave us to the long restless hours of convalescence. But Georgie, true sterling Georgie, remained with Heloise not only through fever and prostration, but through the weary endless hours the invalid could only lie on her sofa next the window, and watch the shifting clouds. As she was almost always with Heloise it followed that Neville Brandon, her lover, came here to see her. What was more natural?

But Neville had a brother, and he too came and was introduced to Heloise. That brother was the very Noel Louis had taunted Carlotta about, and showed his angry jealousy. Thus it is that one cause or one circumstance leads up to another, and effect follows cause, and cause again follows effect, though no one at the time ever dreamt of the ultimate result of the very natural and simple chain of commonplace circumstances.

This Noel Brandon was the battered warrior whom Carlotta had favoured with her smile, and thereby excited Louis's rage. He was not very battered either; but jealousy can see spots upon the sun. A small piece had been shot out of one ear, but the deficiency, not large in itself, was hidden by the curling brown hair. There was a broad scar on his neck, where a spear had penetrated and cut a deep gash, but it was hidden, or nearly so, by the shirt-collar. His left arm was sometimes in a sling, especially in cold damp weather; it was the effect of an old musket-shot. His nose was not slit; that was purely an addi-

tion of Louis's. He was dark by nature, and tanned, by the sun and by incessant exposure, to the hue of the darkest gipsy. But his brilliant black eye betrayed an intensity of animal life and vigour. His broad and massive shoulders, his brown and rather large hand, fitter for the sabre than the pen, the general air of strength and resolution which hovered over the man, spoke the inborn warrior, the Nimrod, the mighty hunter, not only of the timid deer, but of men. Yet he held no commission; he was no parchment captain, no spur-jingling colonel. His commission was issued by the inbred necessity which existed for him to fight. Fight he must, and fight he had from earliest childhood.

What a contrast there was between him and Neville! Never were two brothers so utterly unlike. Neville was all thought, contemplation; Noel was all deed. They had both been great travellers; one at least had been a great explorer. But Neville had always halted on the verge. He sought the primeval forests of America, that he might

commune with Nature in her oldest aspect. But he penetrated a few miles only. Then he sat down and thought. The narrow belt of trees between him and the nearest cultivated plot was as deep a seclusion to him as if it had been a thousand miles in breadth. He retired within himself; he forgot all things but Nature, and Nature entered in, and permeated him. But Noel sprang forward, rifle in hand, and, firing at beasts and Indians alike, pushed his way across to the Rocky Mountains. Seized with an uncontrollable desire to investigate the origin of the mysterious Nile, Neville departed for Egypt. But he paused at the cataracts, on the very edge of the desert. Then again he sat down—and thought. The influence of the ocean of sand, the illimitable expanse of innumerable atoms, entered in and dwelt in his mind. His mental eye saw over and under and round about it, and saw things which the physical eye suspected not. But Noel went out straight into the desert almost alone—straight as an arrow, southwards, ever southwards, right down through

the centre of Africa, till he reached the Cape of Good Hope. A stupendous journey, of which he thought and said and wrote nothing, not a word. He replied to one questioner, that the one thing he did was to 'Push on.' That was his secret. He had no other. Those who wished to know what was in the interior of equatorial Africa could go and follow his track and see for themselves. He should write not a line; look at his hand, how could he? the fingers were stiff from the use of the rifle. The way was open to all—let them go. The secret was 'Push on.'

Neville threw himself down to rest upon the beach, and listened to the surge, and thought. Noel swam out, with his bold breast fronting the waves—out, and still out, till his head was hardly visible. Yet it is a question which had seen the most. Noel had been over the most ground. But Neville had apparently seen as much in a limited space. The secrets of the interior of the forest, the desert, and the ocean, seemed of their own accord to seek him as he sat upon the edge.

Calmly and with divine repose he collected them, and stored them up in the treasure of his mind; ever seeking to discover the true relation of man to nature, ever seeking to discover the attributes of the Great Soul which had called the world into existence.

Almost the one regret of Noel's life was that he had been away, and had not been with the Italian army when finally they entered Rome. He would have given the whole fortune he possessed—no small one—to have marched into the Eternal City one of the soldiers of truth and liberty. It was the one regret of his life.

Almost the one regret of Neville's life was that he never had time enough. People said he was leisurely, even lazy, indolent; that he lingered over things that others passed by in a few minutes. But his complaint was that he never had time enough. He was always hurried away by circumstances just as he was beginning to see—just as his eyes got accustomed to the darkness, and he could penetrate into the unknown. It was so with life. He



mourned its shortness. He should never have time enough.

Thus the soldier who fought for truth regretted his absence from the active scene at a critical moment. Thus the scholar who thought and searched for truth regretted that Time was not long enough to study the works of his God, much less that God Himself.

There was a singular charm about both these men. They were so deeply, so intensely in earnest. There was no show, no stamping of the foot, no waving of the hands, no loud and angry controversy. But there was a depth, a latent resolution which insensibly impressed those who approached them.

Carlotta tried her best to induce Noel to publish his enormous journey through Africa; she knew that it would create a sensation; he must dedicate it to her; there would be an *éclat*. In vain; he paid no attention. This man saw Heloise. He saw too the mark of the cut upon her lip. Some fragment of the truth, despite all the care with which it was hidden, oozed out. Could he help but feel

indignation? How could his heart, brave and generous as it was, help warming to this poor girl? Then Carlotta, hearing of it, also laughed at it, jeered at it, to him ; exulted in it. All the tiger jealousy in her burst out with fierce exultation. She triumphed in it. She gloated over it. Up till then Noel had been fascinated to some extent by her magnificent beauty ; now he was disgusted. His eyes were opened ; he saw the venom beneath the many-coloured skin of the snake. He recoiled. His thoughts dwelt in consequence more upon Heloise.

Poor Heloise ; those were very weary days to her. All her young life used to the free fresh air and ceaseless exercise, all her days spent in restless motion, now tied down to her chair with sheer weakness. Nothing more ; the fever had left her, the scar upon the lip was healed, though the mark was ineffaceble. The physicians said that all she needed was strengthening food, and as soon as possible change. But it was slow, very slow. Sometimes the very weariness of waiting brought the

unbidden tears to her eyes, and she leant her head back on Georgie's loving shoulder and wept silently. When first she rose, the leaves were brown and gold and scarlet upon the trees; now they were gone and the boughs were bare. The swallows had fled; she thought of Avonbourne; how dreary it would look now! Yet she loved it whenever so dreary. How she longed to see Pierce, 'dear papa!' He had been kept in utter ignorance of all this. 'Do not agitate his old age,' pleaded Heloise; Georgie herself saw no good in it. Pierce therefore knew nothing of it, else he would have been instantly at her side.

And Louis? She did not hate him. She did not resent the cruel and unprovoked blow; she did not recoil from the utter brutality of the man. She simply forgot him; with the blow that laid her senseless upon the carpet all memory of him fled. Not that she did not recollect his existence as a person; but he was no more Louis. He wiped himself out of the tablet of her mind at one stroke. He entered no more into her thoughts. It

was as if he had never spoken to her, never come within ken of her vision. She never saw him now, he never approached her. Perhaps it was merciful that this strange forgetfulness of the injury she had sustained had come over her. It prevented her from dwelling upon it. It enabled her to turn her mind to other things, even to find amusement. But Louis was her husband no longer. He was a shadow of the Past which had fled and left no mark. She heard his name, but it brought up no vision in her mind.

There was at times a certain amount of pleasure in this convalescence, especially when she got a little stronger. There were pleasant reunions in the evenings. Heloise sat in the midst in her great arm-chair, well propped up and supported by cushions, as a queen in the centre of her court. Around her gathered Georgie and Neville, and sometimes, more frequently of late, the soldier Noel. Each, one and all, followed their own occupations—that was the convention. Georgie worked at her book, making extracts, writing.

Neville also worked—studying great tomes which he brought with him, the works of Cuvier and of Owen. Noel read a novel. Heloise cared not to read—she worked a little embroidery. They talked when they liked, each when an idea occurred to him or her, and all stayed to listen. But there was no effort to prolong a conversation. Only one common object animated them all by tacit consent—to amuse Heloise. Whoever hit upon a subject, or a discovery, or anything that could interest her, the work was stayed, the book placed on the table, and they joined to please her, to bring the smile to the pale cheek, and the sparkle into her large deep eyes.

And Noel—the restless soldier, the never-tired traveller, the wanderer through desert and forest—what of him? He sat still as a piece of furniture, fearful to move lest he should disturb her. His novel was a mere pretence. He cared for no novels. His eyes were for ever upon her; not always her face, but her dress, her foot, her hand, her work, the chair she sat in. But always Heloise.

The physicians said she was strong enough now to move. But still they delayed; for the early winter was coming on, and they feared the cold weather, the exposure, the possible damp. What they dreaded was consumption. At present she was free from the slightest taint. But a cold, a chill—no one could foresee its effect in her delicate state. So she was compelled to sigh in vain for Avonbourne.

Perhaps it was better,' she said; 'Pierce will not see me till I am strong; then he will not inquire too curiously.'

Why was it that Noel's wandering eye fixed itself so often upon the slender hand? why did he gaze so earnestly at that tiny toy which ornamented the third finger? It was the wedding-ring—the small band of gold, of ductile gold, which he could crush like an egg flat in his strong fingers. But a band of iron, and adamant; a circle strong as the magic circle of the necromancer, which none could overleap. The strong man to whom the simoom of the desert, the spear of the Arab, the roar of the lion, was as nothing,



quailed, recoiled, drew back before this piece of talismanic gold.

Never before had he paused; never, like Neville, halted on the edge. Now he stood at a distance abashed, afraid. For the first time in his life he questioned himself—for the first time doubted himself. Hitherto he had rushed headlong forward, without staying to calculate the cost or the consequences. Now the very same influence which beckoned him on also warned him away.

Those evenings were very happy to Heloise. They soothed her. She never stayed to think or analyse; her life glided on smoothly, and she gave no heed whither it tended. She had no thought beyond herself and her dear Georgie. At that time she lived, as it were, with Georgie and herself. There was no outward influence that she was conscious of; only she began to prattle and talk, as women will to each other, of Georgie's approaching marriage with Neville. It was time now to see about the *trousseau*, to begin to arrange the innumerable details of dress. Into this He-

loise was eager to enter. She did not notice that Georgie seemed to avoid the subject. All recollection of her own unfortunate example appeared to have died away from her mind. She was eager to see Georgie united with her lover and happy. She talked of it incessantly when they were alone. Georgie did not repulse this conversation, but she did not encourage it. She listened thoughtfully, she replied correctly ; but she never began, she never continued, the remarks which Heloise had made. But at such times involuntarily Georgie's gaze fixed itself almost unconsciously upon the mark on her friend's lip—the lately-healed scar, small, slight, but distinctly perceptible. Heloise little thought that hardly a night passed over when Georgie's eyes were not wet with passionate tears, when she did not pray earnestly to Heaven for guidance in this hour of perplexity. Her very heart and soul clung to Neville with a strength that nothing could shake. But marriage—marriage with Louis before her eyes daily—was it strange that she shrank from

it ? And it was not altogether self. She really and truly believed in her own mission—a woman sent to women. As such was it her duty to set forth another example of yielding up her entire being to the uncontrolled and irresponsible rule of man ? Was it not rather her duty to defend her weak and feeble sex against this assumption of irresponsible power and its apparently inevitable effect ? If she herself yielded, how could she persuade others to stand out ? Of what avail was precept without practice ?

But there sat Neville before her eyes, handsome exceedingly, fair and comely, his heart her very own. It was a terrible struggle. Thus, on the one side, the Woman strove to suppress her natural feelings towards the man ; and upon the other, the Man (Noel) struggled with his rising feelings towards Heloise.

And Heloise was unconscious of both these inward battles.



### CHAPTER XIII.

IN the midst of her toilette Carlotta, wearied with the work of binding up her heavy hair, had fallen languidly upon the ottoman, flinging her nude arm negligently over a chair. In this semi-unconscious state of indolent repose, the peculiar power of her beauty was stronger even than when full dressed and in all the flow of her spirits and her stinging epigrammatic wit; for she had that species of wit which, though weak in itself, takes most—the wit *de société*, in the sense of *vers de société*—the light sparkling foam that bubbles on the champagne of conversation.

How is it there has never been written a ‘vision of evil women,’ as there was one of ‘fair women’? For what has been the influence and what the charm of the good and noble compared with that of the subtly evil?

It was well said that the wicked had fairly earned their supremacy over the good in this world by their superior energy.

The devil is always at work. 'The night cometh when no man can work,' was not said of him. The parson and curate, the arch-deacon and the bishop and the archbishop—all the army of the cathedral—sleep the sleep of the just, and dream dreams of a safe and peaceful flock. But the devil never goes to bed. He earns his power as lord of this world by dint of sheer hard work. He has had many historians. There was a catalogue of books written about him published the other day, itself quite a book. But wicked woman, the prime mover, the very soul of the world, has never had her history written yet. What a roll of distinguished names, stretching from when time itself began down to our own day! And over them all there hovers a singular glory—a magnetic influence—a phosphoric glow; and the memory of them lingers in the mind of man. Whence comes it, this irresistible attraction? for it is not all their

beauty alone, great as that may be. Noble and faithful women have been beautiful too, even perhaps far more lovely; but never have they attained to the same effect.

Yes; she was very beautiful, this Carlotta. There was a sense of intense animal vigour, a latent *pantherism* about her. The full voluptuous contour of the form, the superb neck and bust, the head set almost defiantly in its balance, conveyed the impression of physical nature in its perfection and completeness. There was an animal grandeur about her. As she reposed now, with her eyes gazing steadily into vacancy, there arose in them a glittering phosphoric light, such as may be seen in the panther's prowling in the dusk. She was fascinating; but seen thus in the abandon of solitude, there was an indefinable *horror*, as it were, hovering over her, much as there is over the curling folds of a still serpent glowing in colours. It seemed as if her very slumber—her very repose—was an attitude chosen expressly to enable her to spring upon her victim, and fix her claws in



him to the death. It was an unearthly beauty seen thus, without the consciousness of being observed.

One arm was thrown negligently over a chair. It was round and full and firm, white and smooth as the skin of the famous empress who bathed in the milk of five hundred she-asses to preserve the polish of her limbs. What is there so graceful, so love-inspiring as the arm of a handsome woman? This was an arm which, without bracelet, or any contrivance to give the proper apparent curve, might have rivalled the statues of antiquity. The flesh looked as firm as the very marble in which they are carved, yet to the touch it was softer than velvet, and sank into a dimple at the slightest pressure. There was a smoothness, a polish upon the surface of the skin as if rubbed with oil; and here and there the blue veins wandered around it. An arm such as would have taken a theatre by storm; how many of the shouting, cheering amphitheatre would have risked their necks to feel its warm endearing embrace!

There was no effort about Carlotta; no airs, no display; she needed none to attract attention. In the most crowded assemblies she was invariably in a *pose* of perfect complacency, calm; there was no striving after effect. Alone, and unseen, there was the same easy unconscious grace, the ineffable charm of which is greater than that of the most regular features.

Yet she was no longer young. But the very years which would have detracted from the shape of the many had but added to the perfection and completeness of this evil woman. There was a finish, a fulness about her to which youth aspired in vain. It was this very finish, this fulness which made almost a slave of Louis; a slave whom all the loveliness, the freshness, and the purity of Heloise could never retain. Her very age, her very worldliness, her astute cleverness, attracted him irresistibly. There was a sense of personal vanity gratified in walking with this woman—her chosen companion—in the path of flowery wickedness. He knew her

thoroughly—he knew her venomous hatreds, her insatiable conceit, her unscrupulous mind—and he gloried in it. Gloried in the fact that she had stooped to him; that with all her cleverness, and worldliness, and insatiable vanity she had linked her arm with his. She too understood him well. She did not hide from herself his almost devilish delight in the evil side of human nature. She knew that he was no lover in the old and true sense. She knew him thoroughly, and she too gloried in the power of attaching him to herself. What was it, what glory was it, to attract the young and inexperienced, the foolish, and the still more foolish aged? But Louis was a Man: unutterably a bad and abandoned being, but no half-hearted chicken, no poor creature confined in narrow limits by creed or fear. There was a sense of power gratified in attracting him. A strange bond between them, it may be; but no less a real and effectual one. They did not spare each other. He cursed her freely, with all the foul-mouthed vulgarity and brutality he had imbibed in

the low saloons of cities. She quailed not, nor even averted her glance. She stung him to the quick with her bitter words and sneering insinuations. He had struck her before now. That splendid arm lying negligently over the arm of the chair had been bruised by his blows, and shown the blue mark for many a day. Then she would sit before the glass and look at it and gloat over it. Such was her power over him, that in his rage and jealousy she could make him forget his manhood, forget that she was a woman. Perhaps it was this occasional habit of striking Carlotta that led him to hurl Heloise to the ground. And she, Carlotta, had dug her nails into his flesh till the blood spurted up, and relaxed not her hold till Louis beat her off. He could have shown the dint of her teeth and the print of her sharp and pointed nails. At such moments how intense and venomous was the hatred between them! Yet two hours afterwards they were more closely bound together than ever. Who could fathom the conditions, the emotions of rage and jealousy and hatred which crowded

through her mind when she found that Louis was in love with Heloise at Avonbourne, in those months when Horton went trout-fishing? She never said a word to him ; she encouraged him ; she aided him with all her subtle touches and insinuating persuasions. She entered into the warmest friendship with Heloise. She painted Louis in the highest colours. And all the while a red-hot jealousy, a maddening hatred, was consuming her. With that in her heart she gave Heloise the most splendid presents, and arranged her marriage breakfast, almost with her own hands and with a smile upon her countenance. She knew the inevitable result ; she foresaw it as clearly as Cæsar Borgia could foresee the results of his plans. She knew that Heloise's very innocence, now so charming, would in a few months first pall upon and then disgust her fickle husband, stable only in his vices. She knew that Louis would as inevitably return to his allegiance to her. And thus with double bitterness and double gall she should pour the ashes and embers of

misery over her sister, while at the same moment Louis would writhe under his yoke. And this had come to pass exactly as she had planned, and almost as precisely as if events had happened by her order. She had triumphed and glowed with exultation. She had gone about with her heart elate and her step elastic, swelling with self-satisfaction, as she trampled upon Heloise. The period of her glory culminated when Louis struck his wife to the earth, and marked her with an indelible scar. But even in that very hour the tide was slowly turning. From that incident dated the introduction of Noel to Heloise. Noel had been Carlotta's latest success. She had tied him to her heels—this storm-beaten and resolute man, whose fame was so great and so well earned. With a secret delight and a mischievous joy she was busied in making a fool of him; holding him up to the finger of society as her chattel and her toy. Hercules had all but abandoned his club. In a few more weeks his head would be slumbering in her lap. At this moment he saw Heloise.



From that date he came no more. Suddenly and without warning he left her and returned not again ; not even for farewell. She did not reflect that her own indecent exhibition of pleasure in the domestic trouble of her own sister had disgusted him. Her familiarity with Louis had blunted her finer perceptions. She cast the blame wholly and solely upon Heloise. The embers of jealousy and hatred blew up again into a fierce and burning flame. Not that she cared so much about Noel himself. It was Heloise. Her patience, her purity, her innocence, were reproaches to her. They were foils showing off in contrast the darkness of her own character. She had fully expected that Heloise would have left Louis, would have returned to Avonbourne, perhaps would have even entered a suit for separation. But no ; she gave no sign. She remained at Louis's house, silent, patient. This irritated and annoyed Carlotta. It seemed as if her darts, tipped with fire and stained with poison, fell broken and unheeded against this mere child. She chafed and raged inwardly. She

had never intended that Heloise and her affairs should become so prominent a subject in her daily thoughts, should occupy so much of her time. But the hatred and jealousy of Heloise grew day by day and absorbed her very being. Heloise was never long absent from her mind. There was a natural repulsion—almost a necessity to destroy her. There was no peace while Heloise existed, no repose. Of all Noel's conduct—his visits with Neville, his very attitude while there—Carlotta was fully and minutely informed through her housekeeper Maud. Maud, once and for many years a snubbed, and miserable governess, had eagerly taken the post of housekeeper under a peeress. But she had nothing to do with jars and pickles, never hardly ever heard of butcher and baker. These were not her concerns. She was well educated, rather subtle, though suppressed; had some remains of beauty; was no bad foil to her mistress; and she was older. Carlotta had her constantly about her. Her business was undefined, for she had nothing to do with the toilette—in

point of fact it consisted in ministering to the tyrannical caprices of her mistress. A mistress who in every other word sneered at her poverty, her age, her small pretensions to beauty; who flung the cruel usage of the world in her face as if it had been her desert, and occasioned by her fault. A mistress who trod upon her finer feelings day by day, and purposely with intent to wound, and with delight in torturing. O, but the gold! The salary was high. Poor wretch! Through Maud and the servants at Louis's place Carlotta knew everything—had almost hourly information. The sting of it was that Heloise made no effort; was even unconscious, it seemed, of Noel's admiration. Now Carlotta had had to make an unusual effort to secure him for a brief and passing hour. But he followed Heloise of his own accord. Carlotta was unbearable at these times. Maud had serious thoughts of leaving her, even despite the loss of the salary, but for Victor. Victor was in London, expected daily at Carlotta's—to see his aunt for the first time. So she endured

it, finding no peace but in the oblivion of sleep. Carlotta conjured up in her mind a vision of Heloise as described to her, sitting surrounded with Georgiana, Neville, and Noel in those happy winter evenings. She sneered and laughed at this poor and silly amusement. She expressed and she felt the uttermost contempt for Neville and his science, for Georgie and her theories. But in her heart of hearts there was a bitter yet unconscious envy of these men and women who could thus find happiness and content in pursuits not only legitimate but laudable, and even beneficial to the world. Another reproach to her. She hated them; she almost cried for the power to ruin them all. The thought of them embittered the glittering joys of her life. She could not enjoy Rome without destroying Carthage. She listened eagerly to the whispers of society, to catch the slightest hint, the merest indication that the tide of scandal was setting on Heloise. In vain; she met instead inquiries after Noel. People asked what had become of him—why was he no more seen with Carlotta? Per-

haps there was the faintest sound of an ill-concealed delight in these whispers and murmurs that passed round from house to house and circle to circle, the faintest suspicion of a pleasure in the fading charms of Carlotta, who had so long preyed upon society, to the detriment, and the envy, and jealousy of the marriageable female portion. Maud caught at this sound, and magnified it. It was a chance to repay upon Carlotta some of the bitterness she had herself suffered. She dwelt upon it, delicately and by hints, but with sufficient distinctness to bring it home to Carlotta's mind; and then sat down, and sated herself with the sight of the raging tigress tearing her heart to pieces with temper and chafing violence. It was in this mood that Louis found her. She burst upon him, called him a coward, a poltroon, a fool, to let Noel flirt thus with his wife, and remain looking on unconcerned, unavenged. Louis stared: to do him this much of justice, he had never conceived the possibility of Heloise permitting any such proceedings. Unconsciously, his

faith in her was great; so that although he had sneered at Georgie and Neville and Noel, he had never for a moment thought of anything of the kind. Therefore he stared, and finally burst into laughter. Carlotta ground her teeth.

‘Let us consider,’ said Louis, utterly unmoved. ‘If what you say is true, then we may find a method to be rid of this idiot.’

Then Carlotta hissed into his ear a plan that she had formed, and elaborated to seeming perfection. Let Noel have every opportunity; encourage him, throw Heloise upon him, lead them to compromise themselves, then expose them. Louis could thus obtain a divorce.

The sister persuaded the husband to connive at the projected disgrace of his wife. Louis listened, and smiled assent.







## CHAPTER XIV.

HORTON KNOYLE, Esq., the banker, even now did not wish his nephews Victor and Francis to be introduced to their aunt. But when young men grow to the age of five-and-twenty and four-and-twenty they are not to be kept in complete seclusion any longer. It is a necessity for them to enter into society. Now when once Victor and Francis entered into society, society would very naturally soon begin to talk and make remarks if they were not on speaking terms with their aunt. When Victor and Francis therefore left the clergyman's house in Sussex and came to London, they had instructions from their uncle and guardian to call upon Carlotta. These instructions were given with much anxiety and with great reluctance; but still they were issued. Both the brothers were eager to see their aunt.

The very fact that they had been carefully hidden from her view all these years served to stimulate their curiosity, and they had heard rumours even in that quiet Sussex house which added a zest and edge to their curiosity. Victor especially, bolder and more energetic, penetrating more into company, had heard tales of her and her marvellous beauty which filled him with a restless desire to see her. She was no humdrum aunt of daily life. In point of fact she did not seem like an aunt or relation at all to them. She did not seem to belong to Horton Knoyle. It was almost like being introduced to a famous singer or actress.

Carlotta had looked forward to this ultimate meeting with Horton's probable, and indeed announced, heirs with no little interest. In the abstract she hated them. In the person she thought that most probably they would be boorish and a fearful bore. But they had about them the all-important fact of Horton's enormous wealth. She had no children. There it was, Horton was no longer

young. He was hard upon sixty. She more than suspected that he suffered from heart-disease. He was impenetrable—not a hint ever escaped him; his physician was a man of strict integrity, and politely warded off the soft insinuating questions even of his patient's wife, as no doubt he had been instructed to do. Not that Horton was an invalid; but still he was occasionally visited by a physician. That fact could not be concealed from Carlotta. His declining physical vigour was evident enough. All this had caused her many anxious hours of thought. The money! It was not that she was in any way dependent upon the continuance of his life for the supply of her daily necessities. Horton had made a large and liberal settlement upon her at the time of her marriage. But accustomed for so long a time to unlimited resources, the income arising from the sum which was absolutely hers appeared absurdly small. It barely supplied her dress. Not even the almost uncontrolled supply of cash which Horton allowed her could meet her extravagant expenditure.

Unknown to him she had contracted large and heavy debts. She was, it is true, by law entitled to a third of his personal property at his decease. But Carlotta, though she had no conscience, had a brain. It never occurred to her to stay her course, or to seek to ingratiate herself with him. But she inwardly recognised the reality that a breach had long existed between her and Horton. She knew that he was aware of her improper intimacy with Louis. He was a man of steel. He would not show it, or own it in any way; but she felt that he would never forgive it. Full well she knew that her chance of receiving any of his property apart from her own jointure was entirely lost and gone. If he had made a will she had no doubt whatever that her name did not appear in it. Victor and Francis would probably take it all. Therefore, and to some extent not unnaturally, she hated them, and at the same time dreaded the news of Horton's decease. But for that reason, because she hated and detested them, all the more she desired to see and know them. It

was her instinct to fondle and make much of those whom she wished to destroy.

The brothers were in ecstasies with their welcome, Victor especially. He talked of her incessantly. He compared her to all the famous and glorious women history has told of or poets invented. He positively raved of her. It was not wonderful that he did so. He was young ; he had been much secluded ; he was of a particularly ardent temperament ; and he was inordinately vain. His youth and inexperience allowed him to be dazzled ; his ardent temper led him to form daring hopes ; his vanity made him an easy victim. It was so irresistible to have a woman so much superior in age, so resplendently beautiful, so admired and fêted, devote so much of her attention to him. He was her slave, her bondsman. He would have done her bidding let it be what it might. His whole mind and soul was full of her, and her only. She became a passion, and held him. She overthrew all the ordinary landmarks of his mind and conscience, making him insensible to the

calls of honour or of natural affection. Victor was entranced. And Francis? Francis said nothing. He was usually silent, undemonstrative. After he had seen her, he seemed to retire more and more into himself; to brood over his own existence. Gradually a crevice opened between the two brothers, till now so warmly affectionate. Victor, finding no response to his enthusiasm, chafed and sulked, and drew off, and spent his time either with Carlotta or at least away from Francis. Francis did not attempt to detain him. He grew of a sickly hue—pale and sallow. The truth was simple enough. If Carlotta had excited the wildest imaginings in the mind of the fiery Victor, she had absolutely overwhelmed the weak and feeble younger brother. She in all her glorious beauty had entered into his soul, and driven out his own identity. He brooded upon her night and day; he kept her photograph constantly before him, and hung over it. Slowly but surely a smouldering fire of jealousy grew up between these two. Francis could not talk as Victor could.



He was shy, retiring ; nothing could draw him out. Victor pressed forward, said his say, laughed, and used the whole faculties that he possessed. Thus it was that in all company he received twice the attention of the other. Till now Francis was rather glad of this. He rejoiced in his brother's social success, especially as it left him alone and undisturbed. But now he regretted his own shy manners, which he could not shake off, and envied Victor's readiness, till in the end it grew to be a bitter jealousy. Carlotta saw all this. It was part of her plan. Thoroughly she understood the old maxim, ' Divide and rule.' She paid far more attention to Victor; this maddened poor Francis. But secretly she every now and then encouraged him, and at the same time she contrived to rouse a suspicion in Victor's mind that Francis received favours unknown to him. This to Victor was worm-wood. It was worse than open preference. He boiled and raged inwardly. He cursed his brother ; not in his hearing, but when alone—a much worse sign.

All this time there crept about Carlotta's mansion a pale and trembling miserable wretch. It was Maud. A bitter, bitter jealousy arose in her mind. She had feared this, foreseen it. It fascinated her to watch Victor with Carlotta. The iron went right into her heart, and festered there. She saw his bright and happy face beaming with joy if Carlotta favoured him. She saw his frowning look, his fiery glance, if Francis or any one else received a smile. She saw his eager desire, his ardent worship. Her very blood turned cold, and she shivered, as she watched. And she knew that Carlotta was playing with him—playing as a cat would with a mouse. Can anything be imagined more wretched, more miserable, than the position of this woman—guilty herself, conscience stricken, at least to some extent, and watching the partner of her guilty joy, the man for whom she had risked all, thus throwing his very soul at the scornful feet of her tyrannous mistress? It was, indeed, a cruel punishment for her. But it did not chastise her, it

did not reduce her to remorse and contrition; on the contrary, it roused up a fierce and burning desire, not only for revenge upon Carlotta, but to plunge headlong into irretrievable ruin and disgrace with *him*—a disgrace and a ruin from which there should be no withdrawal, but in which lowest infamy he should be entirely hers. Before condemning her utterly, listen to what Pierce at Avonbourne, the gentle and the good, has to say upon these things. Victor had no eye for Maud. He never saw her. Her poor and watery sunset paled and faded away before the brilliance of this starlit night, which ‘walked in beauty,’ and shone with unapproachable glory. Maud longed to destroy her, to trample her in the dust. With a bursting heart she searched her breast, ransacked all the old memories to discover if there was no secret with which she could cast the proud idol as with a lever from its pedestal. The idea of writing to Horton and revealing the fact of her mistress’s familiarity with Louis, of which she was perfectly well aware, and pos-

sessed indisputable proofs of, often occurred to her, but was as often put on one side by the reflection that, in all probability—in fact, she felt no doubt—Horton knew of it already. But she watched and wished; ready to pounce upon Carlotta, and tear her to pieces with unsparing hatred.

This playing with the brothers came as a sort of interlude to Carlotta. It soothed her mind a little. She did not forget Heloise; but it distracted her attention for a while. It sustained her over-weening vanity to find that her charms were still irresistible. She boasted of this aloud to Maud in her dressing-room. She laved her magnificent bust, and called to Maud to come and look upon it; and taunted her with the want of such splendid curves. She triumphed in her intense vitality. ‘I am forty,’ she said; ‘only five years younger than *you*; and look at me! You are faded; your complexion is turning yellow and bilious. I am white, firm, smooth, full. Ah, the men cannot resist me. I am a goddess!’ And she laughed in Maud’s face, and showed her white

teeth. It was insufferable ; it drove the wretched creature frantic. She could have stabbed her upon the spot. But this is the peculiarity of these women : they hate each other to the death ; they spit venom over each other, and torture each other with horrible glee. But they lay no physical hands upon the detested object. Such things only occur in novels ; in real life women never stab or murder. They feel it ; but they never do it. They fight with sharper weapons than steel, with weapons which pierce to the very soul, and sting it to torture and misery. Thus Maud stood outwardly patient and calm, listening apparently unmoved, yet ready at the slightest opportunity to dig the dagger of moral and social vengeance into that shapely and voluptuous form. Playing with these boys was an interlude in the great drama to Carlotta. It refreshed her, revived and strengthened her. But the catlike instinct within her drove her too far. She excited them too much. Thus thrilled to the very inmost core with envy and jealousy, a

collision was inevitable. It came at last, simply enough. It was a dusky evening ; they were both at Carlotta's. Victor was in the drawing-room with her. Francis had somehow wandered into the conservatory, where he sat alone, brooding, brooding, brooding. Presently Carlotta left the drawing-room. Victor chafed at her absence—grew impatient ; at last determined to seek her. At that very moment Maud was watching to get an interview with him. She waylaid him as he approached the conservatory ; but seeing Francis, stepped aside. Victor heard the rustle of her dress, but did not see her. He thought it was Carlotta—Carlotta, who had been alone in the dusky conservatory with Francis. In an instant the long-suppressed rage burst forth. He called his brother a fool, and worse. Francis rose to his feet, pale as death, but without a tremble in his limbs. He faced his brother, but said nothing. In an ungovernable rage, Victor, construing this silence into assent that Carlotta had been there, struck him full in the chest. Francis



staggered, but with a cry returned, and feebly hit out. Then the devil rose in Victor, as he felt the weak blow, and with one strong fierce thrust of his muscular arm he drove Francis headlong down and through the frail support of the plants, crashing into the hollow space beneath. His head struck the brick pavement, and he laid still and silent. Victor turned on his heel with a curse, and left the place. Then Maud stole out from her hiding-spot, and helped up the fallen man. He was insensible; but her eau de Cologne brought him to in time. He groaned once, and only once. Then he besought her to help him to a cab. She got him out somehow by the garden entrance, and into a hansom.

Maud returned musing to the house, to find Victor bending over Carlotta, as if nothing had happened. She went upstairs, and taking out her desk wrote to Horton an account of what had occurred, of the terrible fascination Carlotta exercised, of the fight, and Victor's utter abandonment to the wiles of his idol. At first she tried to disguise her handwrit-

ing, but she found all effort needless. Her hand shook till the scrawl was barely legible. She easily insured its safe postage. She must get Victor separated from Carlotta, or her heart would burst.

There is a tragic and ancient story, a legend of the far-off and distant past, which tells how, of two brothers sacrificing to God, one struck his fellow and killed him, and thus introduced death into the world. It was one of Louis's wicked sneering remarks, that he never could understand how one man could kill another over a mere difference in religion, over a sacrifice. Had there been a woman in dispute between them, he could have more easily credited the death of Abel at Cain's hands.

Not that Francis died, or was even seriously hurt. In a sense, it was not he who was slain; it was Victor who morally died.





## CHAPTER XV.

IT was the more dangerous for Noel, because he saw Heloise grow more and more beautiful every day. He had not at the first seen her in the full splendour of her loveliness. She was pale, weak, an invalid, shorn of half her beauty; yet even then she had fastened his attention. But now, day by day, as she grew better and stronger, and the hue of health returned to her cheek, fresh loveliness suffused her whole being, as the glow of the dawn lights up the grey sky of morning. If she had touched his heart before, how much more dangerous was it not now! At first he questioned himself—doubted, argued with himself; but that was a process that could not long continue with Noel. He simply ignored all questions and doubts and perplexities, and went on visiting and seeing her

week after week, without once asking himself to what all this must tend. He said nothing, did nothing to hint in the faintest manner at his love; but it was absolutely necessary to him to see her. It grew upon him; the days when he was away from her were inexpressibly long and weary. Till now he had looked upon Georgie as rather a bore—a very estimable person, but too much occupied with abstract ideas to afford amusement or company. Now she became invested with an attraction not her own; the light of Heloise lingered on her. Noel cultivated her friendship; he even entered so far as in him lay into her theories. He did not do this from any deep design; he was incapable of forming a deliberate plan to deceive. It was the unconscious outcome of his rising passion.

Georgie was constantly with Heloise; it was natural to pay attention to her. On her part Georgie was delighted to find a new proselyte. She worked hard at Noel; she exhibited all her stores of argument and thought in the endeavour to enlist another

champion of women's right. In the heat of this pursuit she never noticed that Noel's gaze was for ever upon Heloise; she did not observe his abstraction, his abrupt answers and disconnected questions; nor did she notice that she was herself giving him an opportunity of almost constantly seeing Heloise. Thus unconsciously Georgie acted as a screen to allow these two to meet; and thus she also afforded facilities for scandal to fix upon Heloise's name. How bitterly she would have blamed herself—how decidedly she would have stayed the progress of things, if only she had seen this! But she was blinded. So it was that for weeks and weeks Noel sat with Heloise, and drank-in her increasing beauty day by day, and watched her being in all its outward manifestations. All this while there was no thought of Louis in his mind. As he had to Heloise, so Louis had struck himself out of the sight of others. The scar upon Heloise's lip had driven him from his rightful position: Noel never thought of him. This was absolutely true; Louis never entered

into his thoughts, yet the consciousness that Heloise was married did. But the man she was tied to was an abstract idea, no personal reality.

Louis meantime was never seen. He had completely abandoned his mansion. They never heard his name; they never saw him, or had any conception of his whereabouts. No one recollected when last he had been at home, no one had heard for where he had departed; they were left entirely to themselves. Gradually, too, it seemed as if all old acquaintances dropped off one by one. In the morning Heloise remembered that friends used to call incessantly; even during her illness the carriages were constantly at the door. These had dwindled in number, till now the roll of wheels was never heard, the bell was never rung; the house was left alone, solitary. Heloise recognised this with a sigh of relief. While she had been ill she could avoid seeing people under that pretext. She had prolonged it as far as decency would allow. Then she had seen several. They did



not make too curious inquiries, but her sensitive organisation felt that they were criticising the scar upon her lip; so that it was a relief to see no one, and she did not remark upon it. It was what she preferred; and in a little time all thought or notice of the change passed away from her. A new entertainment had opened for her. She was tired of reading; the fanciful heroes and heroines had lost their interest from reiteration. She had begun to cast about for a new mode of passing the time.

Hitherto Noel had sat silent at their evening meetings—silent and watching; but by slow degrees the sense of restraint wore off, and he spoke. Heloise learnt from Georgie of his wondrous travels, and she pressed upon him to relate them for her gratification. Noel, who could never be persuaded to write a book, hung back and hesitated; but she drew him on—she was really curious. Then he began. At first it was a mere bald narrative of journeys, how one day he was here, and another there; but the questions of the

listeners drew from him minute particulars: thus he was led on to details. In the end, a glowing graphic narrative flowed from his lips; such a tale of adventure and danger as it had fallen to the lot of few to dare, and to return to tell. Heloise became spell-bound. Her gaze fastened upon this man, her eyes never moved from his face; but her soul, her thought was far away, following the ideal or abstract Noel through these perils of the forest, the desert, and the deep. That abstract wanderer became endowed and surrounded with all the halo of her own imaginations, till at last she woke up and saw her hero before her in tangible reality. Then Heloise grew meditative and thoughtful; from her mind, too, Louis had utterly departed — it was open, free, unoccupied. Therein from that hour there grew up and increased the image of another. The thought of love never occurred to her. At that time, perhaps, love had not been born in her heart. But she dwelt upon him; he was not as other men. There was much in his complete con-

trast to herself. He was so grandly, so heroically bold—so godlike in disregard, in command almost, of danger; she was so sensitive, so shrinking, and timorous. Never before had she met a man of this class; they had all been commonplace—carpet-knights. This man had fought with Nature, had met her in the innumerable fearful shapes she had assumed, like the magicians of old, and had overcome her. He had encountered her in the form of the desert, the blinding sand, the fierce heat, the burning thirst; he had met her in the forest, with its fever, its beasts and serpents; he had met her upon the vast and illimitable ocean, face to face with her raging storms and thunder; he had met her in a still worse shape—in the shape of human beings dead to all human feelings, brutes of the wild and desolate places. Couching his lance, he had rushed at them all, and overthrown all, and conquered all. In his own person he had accomplished those very deeds which others only read of and wondered at. There was a fascination about the man—the

fascination of ten thousand dangers. Multitudes go to see the man who exposes himself to danger. How many hundreds of thousands hung upon the motions of Blondin on the high rope! With what eager anxiety and interest men rush to the shore to watch a shipwreck, or tear through the streets to the site of a fire! But this man Noel, danger, death, disease—all horror and fear sat upon his brow, and played with him, and he with them, as the snake-charmer toys with the fatal serpents. He stood apart—a being by himself; and she mused upon him, thought of him, and wondered at him, till there arose in her gentle and affectionate breast an almost motherly yearning and tender care for him—a sympathy deep down in the very core of her being. She could have stroked him smoothly with her hand, she could have arranged his pillow for him, and watched him slumber, holding her breath lest he should awaken. Deeper still arose a reverence, an almost fearful reverence of him. He was of another order—very Fate and Destiny

themselves had marked him. She never thought of Louis; but subtle analysts of the human heart and brain may perhaps claim that there was something in all this of the revulsion, the recoil from Louis's utter lack of those qualities she now felt the influence of. He was artificial to the very centre, a scoffer, carefully avoiding all personal risk, scoffing at the brave as fools. There is no need to dilate on what Louis was—we have seen him. She herself never recognised this; daily her mind and soul centred themselves more and more upon Noel. The manliness of his bearing fixed itself before her mental eye, and she saw him always. There came a time, too, when she remembered the years at Avonbourne, and the teaching she had imbibed there at the hand of Pierce—the teaching which drew its deepest lessons from the works of nature; from the sky, the sea, the hills, and the trees. She remembered her visions upon the hill-side, lying on the soft and velvet turf, dreamily watching the slowly-driving clouds, or the shadows over

the golden fields of wheat. Soft memories of these dreams and aspirations—aspirations without a name—came back upon her. Verily it seemed as if this man Noel was the very hero, the very human impersonation of these idealities, these voiceless hopes and imaginings. They had come to her at last in shape and form and tangible reality. Thus Noel came to be surrounded with an atmosphere of all things beautiful and desirable. Gradually and imperceptibly she grew to dwell upon his coming and his going—to watch and wait for his arrival, to sigh at his departure, and to restlessly long for the intervening time to pass. She entered upon a new existence; the monotony of her life passed away; the days were dull and long no more; the weariness and ennui faded; the slow step, the lack of energy, the languidness, were overcome. Her step once more was quick and free, her eyes sparkled and danced as they had done in the olden time at happy Avonbourne. The restlessness, the vivacity returned: she sang as she walked about. The



physicians saw this, and announced that she was well; Georgie saw it and rejoiced, without the slightest suspicion of the cause; Noel saw it, and was overcome. This was still more dangerous for him. He had pictured her as quiet even to a fault; now he saw her in all the glory of her natural spirits and buoyancy. The infection of her joy caught him, and he put away all thoughts and perplexities to revel in the pleasant present. Still no thought of Louis.

There was a magic about Heloise now that she had not possessed at Avonbourne in her earlier time. She was as young as ever—not only in years, but in manner and ways. But there was the additional charm now of a sense of depth that had not previously existed. She was almost too light and gleesome at Avonbourne—too childish, too much like the foam, and the foam only. Now there was a solidity, a depth behind the gladsome ring of her voice and the sparkle of her eyes, which impressed those who saw her with a more lasting memory. Her form too had altered and im-

proved. She had been a little too slight, too fragile. She was slender still; but the arms were firmer, rounder, the neck and bust fuller. She had all the youth of the child, with the charm of the full-grown woman. Once—and once only—a thought crossed Georgie's mind, as she looked at her, of how dangerously lovely she was. Women, even when the dearest of friends, are not apt to dwell on the beauty of another. The thought passed away as quickly as it came, but the memory of it recurred to her in after times.

Thus, without a thought of evil, the germ of unutterable love sprang up in Heloise's heart.





## CHAPTER XVI.

IT was a difficult task that Georgie had now before her. Though they had lived so long on familiar terms, though they had travelled together, and had conversed upon almost every possible topic, yet she hesitated and faltered when the pressure of fast-flying time brought on the necessity of discussing their marriage. Had all gone on as it had begun—had no difficulty arisen in her mind—there would have been no reluctance on her part. Previously she had not avoided the subject, but spoken of it freely and without reserve. But now that her mind had been shaken and her confidence upset by the miserable consequences of marriage as she had witnessed them, she experienced the utmost reluctance to speak upon the subject, and most of all to Neville. He noticed this, but he attributed

it to the natural modesty of her sex, and it caused him no alarm. He did not press her for the cause, or question her as to her meaning. This put her in still greater difficulties. She had hoped that he would press and question her, that he would open the subject: instead of which, time went on, and Neville, perfectly contented, said not a word, while poor Georgie, ever growing more doubtful, knew not what to do, and was afraid to address herself to him lest he should doubt her love and reproach her with deceiving him. At last, however, she made up her mind, and with many an inward tremble launched out boldly into the inevitable argument which she knew must follow. She began about Heloise; she pictured poor Heloise's unhappy alliance in strong and vivid colours, and painted Louis in his true light. The inference was plain, that marriage was a dangerous enterprise—a voyage against which there was no insurance. But still Neville would not take her meaning. All he said was that Georgie need not fear—all this did not

apply in any way to *them*. They had known each other for a length of time; they understood each other's habits and grooves of thought; they were not as others; they had an evidently happy future. So that Georgie was compelled to state in plain and unmistakable words her full meaning, conscious all the time that Neville was listening, not only with amazement, but too probably with a growing anger and distrust. What she meant was this. Personally she feared the risk of marriage. She knew and appreciated the worth of Neville—she never for a moment supposed him capable even under provocation of the atrocious conduct of Louis; still she had a dread of the unknown. Apart from her own concerns also there arose the question of the right and wrong of marriage. Was it as it at present stood an institution truly and in all completeness in accordance with those laws divine which Heaven had impressed upon human nature, in the same way as laws of motion, for instance, had been affixed to material nature or matter? She confessed that she

had many and great doubts on this point. As a feeble instrument, as an earnest seeker after truth, was it her duty thus to assist in her own person at the perpetuation of marriage in the present condition of that institution? In plain words, she did not want to marry under the existing laws of matrimony. Neville listened to this confession in the most utter silence and surprise. He was taken completely off his guard; he had not the remotest conception that anything of this kind had been working in her mind. The first impulse was one of anger and distrust, just as she had feared. Why had she so long concealed this from him? But as she proceeded, and as he marked her evident confusion and the difficulty under which she laboured in explaining herself, this feeling wore away, and in all love and tenderness he set earnestly to work to combat her decision. It was unfair, he said, to judge of marriage by the unfortunate example of Heloise and Louis. One example did not prove a case. If she argued from the evil result in this instance that all men were



liable to stray and to err as Louis had done, he might as easily argue that all women were evil and wicked and unfaithful because Horton Knoyle's wife had done as she had. Georgie in an instant snatched at this remark. It proved her very own conclusions; for, said she, she admitted that the woman was as often at fault as the man, and she could not guarantee that she should never give him provocation. This was all nonsense, cried Neville, really cross for the moment; it was impossible that *his* Georgie, his own true Georgie, could ever be as Carlotta was. That woman was an exception, a rare occurrence. It was an insult to him even to suppose that he should ever even ask any one at all like her to marry him. If she (Georgie) had ever exhibited the faintest trace of a disposition resembling Carlotta's he would never have continued so long in her society. Then Georgie, beaten and driven back in the personal argument, but unconvinced, widened the scope of the discussion by bringing in the general aspect of the question. To look at it in a philosophical and distinct

light, was it a natural contract? The man by the very words of the marriage-service was to be considered as a being immensely superior to the woman—a creature so much grander and nobler that the woman was made to swear that she would obey him. Now one of the first principles of that small but heroic band of persons of which she had the honour of being a member, however unworthy, was that the woman was really equal to the man. How could she then swear in all honour to ‘obey’—that was to surrender up her very soul, to give up the right of private judgment? That very right of private judgment for which the martyrs of the Protestant cause had so cheerfully died, as the first and most fundamental of the relations between the creature and the Creator. If, then, she as a Protestant did not surrender her judgment to the priest, the holy Church, the representative of Heaven, how could she surrender it to a man, a person of whom she believed herself to be the natural equal?

Neville did not attempt to argue this point

with her. He knew that it would arouse the dearest prejudices of her sect. He contented himself with saying that the phrase 'obey' need not in their case at least be taken in so full and expansive a sense. She must know full well that he had no desire to tyrannise over her, to control her either morally, mentally, or physically. Had he ever shown any disposition to do so? Had he not ever, on the contrary, rather bent his own inclination to favour her views? But if the experience she had had of him was not sufficient, he would go still further. At least she knew she might rely upon his honour. He would give her his most solemn word of honour—he would take an oath if she pleased—that he would in no way attempt to control or interfere with her in the slightest degree. That would surely satisfy her and meet her objection. No, she did not mean what she had said in that way. She did not suppose that he would ever take advantage of the power which the law would give him—a power, by the bye, which no oath or promise could deprive him of. The law

did not recognise illegal contracts. But he really quite misunderstood her. He must remember that all men were not Nevilles ; all men had not his intellect, his calmness, his generous forbearance. She stood forward as the representative of woman in general, she did not demand her own rights ; it was in the interest of her whole sex that she hesitated to enter into matrimony. What then, asked Neville, did she mean ? What was the ultimate meaning of all this ? Were they never to marry—were they ever to remain apart, mere friends, acquaintances, fellow-students, no more ? Georgie was unprepared here. She had no ready answer—her heart beat too fast. This came home to her. She could not rise completely superior to her own feelings ; yet she managed to say that such must be the case, at least till some alteration took place in the marriage-laws. Then Neville threw his arms round her and held her close, and gazed earnestly into her eyes—eyes that faltered and turned away from him. Did she really mean this seriously, or was she only trying him ?

Surely she never could mean it? Surely his Georgie loved him? Her head drooped on his shoulder, and her eyes filled with tears. Love him—love him? He knew that her whole heart was his. Then why not let love assert its supremacy and overcome these mere shadowy objections, these mere fancies of the mind. To her—so highly intellectual—after all, these acts of parliament, these institutions as they were called, could be really of no consequence; she could see beyond and through them. Let love assert itself and conquer all things. For the moment he almost convinced her. She wavered and gave way. He pressed a warm and lingering kiss upon her lips, his embrace tightened. He pursued his advantage. He could feel her heart beating and throbbing tumultuously. But suddenly she burst away from him, and stood up to her full height in all the majestic beauty of her stature and her statuesque shape. The mind within, whether mistaken or not, exercised its dominance over the heart and the feelings. The mind conquered. She hesitated no more.

She declared her purpose firmly, decidedly: she would never, never marry under the present laws. She loved him—she confessed it freely, openly. Never should she love any other—never forget his memory, or what he had been to her. Always he would be her dearest friend, her chosen companion; always he would be her leader, her adviser. But never, never would she reduce herself to the level of a slave chained for ever. Then she turned and fled, not trusting herself to say more.

Neville was left alone. He was literally overwhelmed, it came so unexpectedly upon him. But yesterday happy in the anticipation of the rapidly approaching union, and now in a moment the ground was cut away from beneath his feet. He felt giddy, his head seemed stunned. He hardly knew what he did, nor could he fully realise the position. It was days before he recovered himself, and once more, with renewed love and affection, set himself to overcome her rash resolution. He did not attempt to argue, he even totally



ignored the subject; but he showed his love more plainly than before. They had been so long living on familiar terms and in such constant intercourse, that to a certain extent those little attentions and courtesies which are the language of love had been neglected. Neville renewed them. He watched her every motion, he anticipated her very thought. His hand lingered in hers; there was an increased warmth in his glance, a tender intonation in his voice. The intense affection of the man spoke out from his entire being. This was very trying to Georgie. At first she attempted to ignore it, to pass it off; but the endeavour was useless. She could not; her woman's heart clung to him, her being thrilled at his touch, her heart hung upon his words. Gradually she melted. Nothing was said about marriage, but the reserve which Georgie had begun to maintain melted away. She basked in the sunshine of his love; she gave herself up to the intoxicating delight. She told herself that this was allowable at least; in this she did not desert her post and her

mission. She did not recognise that in this very abandonment of herself to him she was even then surrendering her private judgment ; that at that moment she 'obeyed' him in the true spiritual sense. Her soul answered to his, and moved now this, now that way, as his inclined ; her mind was absorbed in his mind. This was obedience in its most absolute and highest excellence. In the silence of the night, alone in her bed, Georgie, unconsciously to herself almost, was engaged in working out the problem how to reconcile this complete and utter devotion to Neville with the usages and the requirements of modern society. Was there no means, no way of enjoying the intense and heavenly happiness without surrendering her post and mission, and yet at the same time satisfying those requirements of morality and decorum which society properly and rightly demanded should be observed ? She did not put the question before her in so many words, but it was constantly present in her mind. The instinct of love was certainly implanted in the human creature by its Crea-

tor ; it was born with it as much as the instinct of eating and drinking. It was therefore as lawful to indulge in the one as in the other. More than that, if society by a traditional usage—by the laws of marriage in fact—prevented a rational creature from following that instinct, then society constituted itself a law-giver, and took upon itself to oppose nature and Heaven. In other words, if she was prevented from marrying Neville by the irrational and unrighteous nature of this contract, if she was compelled to accept an illogical contract or to abstain, it was evident that society was not only wrong but guilty. Heaven gave her a mind, and in giving her that mind commanded her to use it. By using that mind she discovered that marriage as at present contracted was irrational and led to the worst consequences. But Heaven had also given her a heart and bade her love, and it was her right to indulge that love as much as it was her right to think and act for herself. Therefore those who opposed the free exercise of both these endowments, of the

mind and the heart, must be opposing the will of Heaven. Was there no way of reconciling the laws of nature with the laws of society? This was her problem night and day.

There came a time when an idea dawned upon Georgie which seemed to promise to go fairly towards solving the difficult and complex question. Her modesty recoiled from it at first; but she conquered her modesty, at least this species of modesty, in the same way as she had conquered the allurements of her feelings. Slowly and by degrees she thought it out and planned it all. Then with this came a certain complacency, a glow of satisfaction, that she had been chosen to inaugurate a new era, to set an example for all time to follow. Out of this feeling grew up a resolution to carry out her purpose, let the world say what it might, let whatever difficulties occur. Her love and her enthusiasm in her cause she felt sure would carry her triumphantly through. With one bold step she should free her sex from the trammels which bound them. She should be the Ma-

homet, the prophet of a new social dispensation. She would sacrifice herself unhesitatingly, freely, to procure this great and inestimable advantage to her kind. Upheld by the strength of her faith and of her enthusiasm, she would face the burning fires of scandal, and finally conquer the dark armies of prejudice.





## CHAPTER XVII.

PERHAPS of all the trash that was ever written or printed nothing equals the abominable bosh which issues day by day from the French press as fiction. This is speaking of course in the aggregate. French novels there may be unoffending at least; but the mass are infected with a corruption unsurpassed in its foulness. Yet out of all this vast heap of loathsome scurrility there may be gleaned at least one exceedingly bright and resplendent jewel. Among the odd and fantastic creations of the prolific pen of Alexandre Dumas there exist three chapters worthy to be enshrined in the very cathedral of literature. And of all other books these chapters are to be found in *Monte Christo*—that most improbable work. Yet there they are—precious gems set in lead and hidden beneath loads of



verbiage, unnoticed by the careless, scarcely alluded to or ever thought of in the works of other authors. These chapters detail the life and labours of the Abbé in the prison on the French island. The sailor who is confined in the deep dungeons of that structure for some alleged political offence passes months in a state of mind which changes from a maddening rage and impotent restlessness to a condition of mental stupor, utterly overcome and conquered by the oppressive loneliness and the war of his own passions. It is then that, sitting in silence and perfect repose in his cell, he becomes gradually conscious of a slight knocking sound, a dull and muffled thumping apparently proceeding from a depth beneath his bed. By slow degrees this noise becomes more and more loud; but it invariably ceases a few minutes before the gaoler visits him with food; hence he naturally concludes that it is some prisoner endeavouring to escape. Impressed with this idea he waits till the sound recommences, and then stamps with his foot; instantly the

noise ceases. In this way he establishes a means of communication with the other, and at length by the removal of a stone, a narrow tunnel is exposed, some twenty feet in length, running through the solid wall of the prison fortress. From this tunnel emerges the person of a prisoner—the Abbé. These two become friends, and the sailor is introduced to the Abbé's labours. This man has been confined there for many years. In vain he waits for release, and offers millions to be permitted to reënter life. This offer of millions leads the authorities to the belief that he is mad. Even the sailor, struck as he is with the Abbé's ingenuity, is a little staggered with the other's persistent claim to be the discoverer of enormous fortunes. However, he listens to the story. The Abbé was secretary to the Cardinal Spada, who, himself poor, was the descendant of a cardinal *tempore* Cæsar Borgia, who possessed fabulous wealth, and was in fact poisoned for that wealth by the famous son of Pope Alexander VI. But after his death not a ducat of this enormous

treasure could be found—it had vanished, and Borgia was disappointed. A tradition survived that it had been hidden on some desolate and uninhabited spot from a dread of this very assassination. The Abbé, secretary to the modern cardinal, exercises his ingenuity in endeavouring to discover these lost millions, but fails entirely, till the Cardinal dying bequeaths to him his books and a few hundred scudi. After destroying the private papers of the deceased, the Abbé sits in the study mournfully recollecting his virtues and friendship till the increasing darkness causes him to light a lamp. For this purpose he snatches up a piece of parchment lying as a marker in a breviary that had belonged to the assassinated cardinal three centuries previous. As the parchment shrivels in the flame he observes written characters stand out, revealed by the heat from the secret ink in which they were originally inscribed. He blows it out, but on inspection only sufficient remains to show that it was a memorandum of the ancient cardinal of the spot where he

had buried his treasure. All the directions and indications of the spot are burnt, to his intense chagrin. But the Abbé with ceaseless patience, and with extraordinary ingenuity, restores word by word, and letter by letter, the missing guides, and at last produces a perfect copy of the original paper, with full directions as to the place of burial of the treasures. These directions he is about to follow, when he is arrested for political purposes and cast into prison. There he remains for years making applications to various parties to release him, and offering millions of money to the prison authorities to connive at his escape. They laugh him to scorn as mad. During all the time that he does not abandon hopes of release from without the Abbé is engaged on the most ingenious works. He constructs a sun-dial, by means of which and a ray of sunlight that enters the window, he is enabled to measure the flight of time. He makes ink with the lampblack from his lamp and the oil which feeds it. His paper he supplies by tearing a linen shirt into narrow

strips. On this he composes a history of Italy, writing the more important passages in blood drawn from his own arm. His pen is made of a piece of fish-bone, taken from the fish supplied as food. He makes a geometrical calculation of the thickness and direction of the prison walls, and having laid down the direction a subterranean tunnel must pursue to enable him to escape, he sets to work to drill it through the solid wall. His food is supplied in an earthenware dish; this he breaks, till it is brought in a species of iron pan with a handle. This handle he uses as a chisel, and with it by degrees works out stones and mortar, till at last, after years of labour, he arrives under the sailor's cell, only to find that by an error in his calculation he has deviated from the proper course, and is no nearer escape, while his increasing age and feebleness prevent him from further effort. But even then he submits with unflinching patience. The contrast between the restless sailor and the calm, patient, persevering, ingenious, and almost divine Abbé, is



striking in the extreme merely as a dramatic fiction.

These chapters ought to be printed in gold letters, and distributed by the societies in London which busy themselves with the moral education of the masses. They should be hung up in crimson and purple covers in the study of every man who claims the prerogative of thought. They should be printed at the end of the Apocrypha, as in themselves the finest record of human wisdom, worthy of admiration in all time to come. The man who could write them must have been, with all his faults, no common individual. The lessons they teach are simply sublime. The conquest of human patience, of human ingenuity and ceaseless labour over matter, over all the obstacles that could be presented to it, was never so strikingly shown. Out from the very page starts up a voice crying, 'Go thou and do likewise. With such patience, such perseverance, such ceaseless labour and ingenuity, there is nothing thou canst not do, nothing that need in any wise appal thee.'



This is the inestimable jewel in the toad's head of French filth.

It was with this 'eternal patience,' this endless ingenuity, and unfailing perseverance, that Horton Knoyle, the millionaire, had built up his colossal fortune, bit by bit, and step by step. From the low position of the second son of a country gentleman, barely rich enough to give his eldest a profession, and only able to afford an education to the rest, Horton had risen by the sheer power of his own mind to be the companion of princes and the friend of kings. By tiny morsels at a time his mind of polished steel had bored its way clean through the thickest walls of society—to emerge in what? The story of the Abbé has its sad side too. He emerged in a dungeon. Horton emerged in— But we shall see.

It was part of Carlotta's plan to avoid alarming Heloise. If the slightest rumour reached her ears that people had begun to talk of Noel's visits, then her scheme was at an end. Heloise would take the alarm, and be upon her guard. Outwardly at least all

would be well. In this plan Carlotta did not take into account the possible virtue of Noel. She set him down as the same as other men. Thoroughly she adhered to the belief that 'the thoughts of men's hearts are evil continuously.' It never occurred to her that possibly Noel might admire Heloise, even love to the verge of desperation, and yet stay at the verge, and go no further. She did not believe in human resistance to temptation. She had tempted too many, and watched them fall. Had she not, for a time at least, tempted this very man? Louis's absence from home was by collusion. He obeyed Carlotta's instructions to give the two every opportunity that could lead to crime. He went further than mere absence from home. He abstained from all society in town—saving Carlotta's, which he enjoyed by stealth—so that men said he was on the Continent. Then Carlotta spread one of those whispers which travel from house to house, unseen, yet rapid as the telegraph. There was a domestic difference—a slight, only a slight disagreement—between Louis and his

wife. She wished to remain in total obscurity, unvisited, unnoticed for the time. It would be a kindness if people would not call, it was painful to her to meet others. Traced to Carlotta, to Heloise's own sister, the rumour was at once accredited, and acted upon; while at the same time it roused vague expectations of a possible *dénouement*, and prepared the ground for the ultimate disclosure for which Carlotta sighed. These steps succeeded to perfection. No one visited Heloise. Louis was supposed to be abroad. Noel went oftener and oftener. But after a time Carlotta grew dissatisfied with the progress of affairs. She could not wait. Her fiery vindictive temper, if it was not employed in scorching up others, must waste its energy in destroying herself. She ate her own heart, to use the old proverb; she gnawed at herself, and lived upon her own venom and hatred. This could not be borne. Noel made no progress, her spies informed her. He was no nearer now than he had been weeks previously, or even than when he began. He had not even opened his lips. Not a single

assignation had taken place between him and Heloise; not a kiss had passed. The man was a milksop. A fierce contempt for him arose in her mind. She hated and despised him at the same moment. The lackadaisical idiot—the mere sentimental baby! But with this feeling there rose a parallel belief that through Noel's instrumentality she should never carry out her project of ruining Heloise; should never enjoy the spectacle of her disgrace and fall, to rise no more. Her hot blood surged within her and turned blacker and blacker with the violence of her spite. The very sense of impotence embittered it all. Never before had she failed; never before been baffled and made to feel her own powerlessness. Had she been Noel, how easily she could have subdued and enchained a female heart! With what ease she had conquered and enchained scores of proud men, the masters of the universe, the lords of creation, pah! the fools. But if man was a fool, woman was the merest plaything. Carlotta entertained the most ineffable contempt for her own sex.

Here was a man who could not subdue a child—a mere child such as Heloise. The very incapacity he exhibited was maddening. The dulness of the dolt incensed her beyond all measure. Something else must be done. *She* must step in herself. Her hand must go to work. With ease she should conquer. If she were only a man, Heloise would fall within a month; and society should ring with her destruction. This creature longed to exchange her sex, that she might effect the ruin of her own flesh and blood. I call her ‘creature;’ the word ‘woman’ is disgraced in such a being. But this Carlotta lived, for I knew her.

In this frenzied mood of rage and impotent hatred there came a letter from Horton’s solicitors. This was what she read, slowly, deliberately, as one spells out a death sentence :

‘3 Gray’s Inn, November 187—.

‘My Lady,—It is with extreme regret that we are compelled to address you by the instructions of our much-respected client, your honoured husband. In so doing, we are dis-

charging a duty as painful to us as the resolution taken by our client must have been to him. We are particularly requested to approach you with every mark of the most exalted esteem, and in any negotiations which may arise we are strictly instructed to extend the deepest consideration and the finest delicacy towards you. If in any particular we appear to deviate from these instructions, we beg you to attribute it to the lack of words in which to express our client's meaning in an entirely inoffensive manner: and not to any want of study on our part how to spare you the faintest annoyance.

‘These were the words dictated to the active partner of our firm by Horton Knoyle, Esq., who telegraphed for his attendance in Paris: “You will endeavour to break this decision to Lady Knoyle in a form which shall spare her the slightest sensation of humiliation. She is aware that in the early years of my career, when fortune favoured me with the honour of her hand, I experienced the effect of a sustained and rooted passion for her equal



in intensity to my admiration of her unsurpassed beauty. The memory of those times therefore increases the difficulty under which I labour in conveying the altered and estranged sentiments of which you will be the channel of communication. These are not hasty steps. The germ of the present movement on my part was sown many years ago by the thoughtless—I would not use a stronger expression—by the thoughtless conduct of Lady Knoyle; a conduct which exposed her to the comments and criticisms of society. These comments and criticisms pained me to the quick, accustomed as I had been the whole of my life to stand before the world unstained, unassailed. But this I passed over without remark; bearing my wound unseen, and unspoken of, hidden in my own heart. Since then there has been growing in my mind an increasing suspicion, warranted by facts that have come to my knowledge, that Lady Knoyle has overstepped the boundaries of mere flirtation, and has indulged in improper familiarities with Lord Fontenoy. My open

use of that gentleman's name—a use which, if I am mistaken, may subject me to the severest punishment—proves beyond doubt or cavil that I am in possession of credible information, and that I do not act without warrant. Even this, however, I have overlooked and borne with; anxious that the fame and honour of my name should remain pure and unsuspected of an interior corruption by the world, willing to bear my private disappointment with that great object. Therefore I have permitted this intercourse with Lord Fontenoy to exist for a lengthened period; until indeed at last I had grown to bear the daily mortification of my secret disgrace with some little patience, hoping in the end that the better nature of Lady Knoyle might triumph, and enable me to heartily forgive her. But of late an occurrence has transpired which only came to my ears through an accidental and anonymous channel, but which I have since fully verified; an occurrence which it is utterly impossible for me to ignore. Having no children myself, I had designed that wealth with which it

has pleased Heaven to endow me to descend after my decease to the two sons of my lamented brother. Anxious that these young men should escape the taints of the world, and that the evil nature which is implanted in every one should in this case at least receive no encouragement to send forth noxious weeds, I placed them, and continued them under the care of a good and benevolent man, till a period arrived at which it was no longer possible to retain them in tutelage. During that time I had secluded them from the personal acquaintance of Lady Knoyle. But I need not dwell upon this painful subject. Suffice it to say that on coming of age these youths were by my orders instructed to call upon Lady Knoyle. What followed it is indeed distressing to me to relate to you. The two boys, fascinated with the mature charms of Lady Knoyle, grew jealous, their long friendship was broken, and the elder struck his brother senseless to the earth; this demoniacal quarrel being fomented by the aunt, their natural adviser on the loss of their parents. On mak-

ing strict inquiries I find that this horrible story is indeed true in every detail. I also find, to my extreme regret, that all the care I had taken in the education of these youths had not prevented the elder from forming a disgraceful *liaison*, and from various acts displaying a vicious temperament. The younger appears to have been entirely misled by his brother, and by— But I will add no further words upon this matter. After this conduct upon the part of Victor Knoyle it becomes, of course, impossible that he can in any way inherit any part of my fortune, or expect any further interest to be taken in his career by me. I feel it also my duty, as trustee for my brother, in the fear lest the possession of too ample means may encourage his propensity to vice, to take the 42,000*l.* to which he is entitled out of his control, and to pay him instead a life annuity of 300*l.*, which I am empowered to do by the will of my deceased brother. Francis will remain in my will. It now remains for me to deal with Lady Knoyle. This last and culminating in-

discretion, to call it by no harsher words, exhibits her character in a light upon which a favourable construction cannot by any ingenuity be placed. The matter therefore does not admit of argument or of compromise; strict measures are the only ones I can adopt. The course which after serious consideration I have resolved to follow is this; and I must entreat you to particularly impress upon her the extreme desirability of her at once and without opposition submitting to my decision, since opposition can only lead to exposure, and *as an event is approaching* which will inevitably and inexorably condemn her. From my will the name of Carlotta Lady Knoyle is, of course, expunged. It will be necessary for me indeed to entirely rewrite my testamentary disposition, which I propose to do speedily with your assistance. The jointure of Lady Knoyle was 100,000*l*. This jointure she no doubt believes she possesses entirely free from any interference upon my behalf. And such indeed was my intention at the time when my infatuation of her beauty was at its height. But it so



happened that at the very hour when the deeds were to be completed, your late respected partner was on his way to assist in the completion, fell a victim to an accident, and died ere he could reach me. Thus it was that the marriage took place without the formal completion of the document; and in one word, as you yourselves are perfectly well aware, Lady Knoyle is entirely dependent upon my bounty. While therefore I advise her to retire from society, and to consent to a judicial separation, I do so with full power on every hand to carry out my intention. I propose that she should retire to some spot on the Continent or in America; and for that object I will allow her an immediate sum of 1000*l.* all her jewelry, and a further annuity of 1000*l.*; which will be ample for all the necessities of life. The loss of that social position which she has hitherto enjoyed will be her punishment for that wanton indiscretion which could not rest satisfied with these advantages. In the event of her refusing to accept these conditions, there remains but one alternative—a divorce, to which



extremity I am resolved to proceed. You, gentlemen, are aware that I possess evidence sufficient for that purpose; and in that event I shall absolve myself of all responsibilities as to Lady Knoyle's future existence. These are my unalterable decisions, and I request that I may be spared the pain of needless pleading, to which I shall lend a deaf ear. You will oblige me by immediate attention to this business."

'Such, madam, were our client's instructions; and we are compelled to beg your early reply to our communication.

'We remain, very faithfully and obediently,

'Your humble servants,

'WILLIAMSON, VERNEY, & Co.

'Solicitors.'

This 'business'! Carlotta read the letter through from beginning to end, slowly, deliberately, weighing every word, while gradually a faint tint of a rosy colour appeared on her cheeks, and deepened till as she ended her whole countenance was in a scarlet glow, not

the healthy red of exercise or heat, but the scarlet glow of inward fever. Her large dark eyes flashed with unutterable brilliance as the paper fell from her hand. But her lips did not tremble. She remained there for a second or two, and then extended her hand, which did not shake, and rang the bell. Maud came. Carlotta uttered but one word—

‘Brandy!’

But in that one word, in that scarlet flush, in the fallen letter, Maud saw that her bolt had buried itself right to the head in Carlotta’s breast.





## CHAPTER XVIII.

CARLOTTA had for many years anticipated an open rupture between herself and Horton. In the beginning of their married life, when she first used her fatal powers of fascination, she had even then a premonitory sense of a quarrel to come. But in those days she did not fear it—she rather did her best to provoke it, secure in her beauty, safe that he would return again to her feet. But Horton said nothing; never even let it be seen that he noticed her proceedings. Then she grew still more reckless and indifferent to his feelings. Time went on, and Horton made no sign. Yet even in the height of the excitement into which she plunged, and which was her daily bread, there still lingered in her mind an indefinite dread of the finale which instinct as well as reason told her must even-

tually come. When Horton left her almost entirely to herself ; when he was away for months and months, without a letter, and without a hint that he existed, she revelled wilder and wilder, and dipped deeper into the sea of dissipation. This creature had no conscience, but she had a mind, and she had a subtle and unerring instinct. She knew that Horton's nature, cold as polished steel, hard as polished steel, would never bend ; but the fear was—would it break, and would the ruin fall on her? Of late the sense that this ultimate end could not be far off had driven her faster and faster on the road of reckless infamy. She grew careless of disguise—she resorted no longer to underhand processes by which to obtain a guilty liberty ; she walked openly in evil, as we saw her stalking brazenly through the streets of London in the dress of a man. There was a feeling that her time was drawing near its close—that the license granted by the fiend was near its expiration. What, then, was the use of disguise—disguise which was certain to be pene-

trated? She would waste no time—she would do all the mischief she could whilst she had the power. Thus it was that she exerted herself to foment discord and hatred between the brothers. Thus it was, too, that her envy and bitterness against Heloise increased in violence. *She* would not fall; she would endure when disgrace and infamy covered her own name. Carlotta hated her for this. So that it was not with any great surprise that she received the letter from Horton's solicitors. This was the reason that she read it through with such calmness; there was actually a certain amount of pure curiosity to see what the blow would be like now it was about to fall. But the end of it all stunned her. She had never anticipated anything like this. No such conception of utter ruin had ever occurred to her. The utmost she had expected was a separation by mutual agreement, with a handsome income to spend on dissipation and pleasure as she chose. But this cold-blooded judgment, this sentence as of a judge upon his throne, threw her completely off her

balance. Even her iron nerves, her grand physical organisation, shook and trembled. In that hour the foundation of her life was displaced more than it had been in the whole of her years ; and a crevice opened in the walls which never closed again. For days she remained in a state of stupor. She went through her toilette, through the usual daily affairs, apparently unconcerned, except that there was an absent expression in her eyes. She was in fact sleeping—sleeping as she walked about, and talked, and ate, and drank. Her panther-like, her wild-beast nature fled to slumber as its refuge and its medicine. Slumber alone could restore her vitality. And this species of somnambulance did restore her vitality. About the fourth day she arose in all her old *fierce* beauty, if such a phrase may be used. Even Maud was staggered. Carlotta reared her head, like some magnificent flower that had been bowed by the storm, but whose stem was not broken. She stood up as proud, as untamable, as vigorous as ever in body and in mind. The gloss on her hair was



as lovely, the glow of her dark eyes as bright, the graceful sway of her motion as enchanting as ever it had been. Maud was dismayed, disconcerted. Was it possible ever to have revenge upon this strange and inexplicable being? Would nothing crush her? Maud began to feel something of that superstition which in the olden times led men to load their guns with silver bullets, in the belief that the evil one himself protected the bodies of certain tyrants from the effect of leaden balls.

Carlotta, recovered in body, bent her mind resolutely to meet the difficulties which beset her as firmly and with as little hesitation as Cæsar Borgia might have done. She would conquer yet: it might be that she would be revenged upon them yet. The first thing she did was to pen a short message to Williamson, Verney, & Co., acknowledging their letter, and saying that she would formally reply to it after a few days of consideration. The object here was to gain time. Her first impulse was to send for Louis, that they might

consult together. But she reflected that Louis was utterly as selfish as herself, as unscrupulous, and as little to be depended upon. He might even desert her entirely now that she had fallen. *That* she was determined he should not do. He should share her fall, come what might; how to secure this? But first, could she by any possibility outwit Horton? Could she throw any obstacles in the way of his will—could she prevent by stubborn resistance the execution of his decrees? Carefully she re-read the letter, and considered it point by point. She knew Horton too well to attempt to move his heart by any personal appeal, the day for that was gone by. A hundred chances to one he would refuse to see her; if she gained access to him unawares he would move away. He was as cold, as hard as polished steel. It was impossible to bend him. The next question was: had he in any way deceived her in order to gain his end? Was there any statement in that letter not grounded on fact? She was constrained to admit that there was not. She

felt positively certain that Horton even in the last agony of hatred could never utter a falsehood. He was truth, probity itself, even to a fault. It was his pride that through that very truthfulness he had invariably succeeded in everything he had undertaken. She felt no doubt whatever that his statements were absolutely accurate; she remembered the accident to the lawyer on his way to make the marriage settlement. But up till now, as she had always enjoyed the fullest control over the interest of this 100,000*l.*, she had rejoiced in the fancied security of its being entirely her own. Did Horton deceive her in this? She recollected that once when she had written a cheque for a heavy sum on this very account it was returned to her. The banker would cash nothing above the amount of the annual interest. It was clear then that she really had no control over the sum itself. Yes, without any doubt, what Horton had stated was positively correct. He could leave her utterly penniless. The 100,000*l.* was completely in his hands. She had not a

penny to call her own. Granted all this, now what were his terms?—a miserable 1000*l.* per annum and residence abroad. This sum was not sufficient to keep her in the bare necessities of life. It meant total banishment from all those scenes of pleasure—all those displays in which the greater part of her life had been spent, and which had grown to be second nature to her. She would just as soon have divorce, and freedom to marry again, without a farthing of money from him. She felt confident in her own power to attract some fool to her side. But at the same time there rose in her breast a raging hatred of Horton. This monetary meanness excited her beyond all bounds. Till she began to realise what this 1000*l.* a year meant she had felt no temper so far as he was concerned. But to deprive her of the very spirit and soul of life, and cast her in this wretched way into the outer darkness of banishment, aroused the latent ire within her. She registered a fierce vow to have revenge for this; but she had control enough over herself even in that hour

of mortification to throw aside her temper for the time, and to bend the whole force of her mind upon the question of ways and means, upon dealing with matters as they stood. It again occurred to her to face Horton; to defy him; to run the gauntlet of public exposure and of the inevitable inquiry. It would cost him more than it would her. On her side there would be an *éclat* about it; on his nothing but disgrace. For the moment she even thought of going upon the stage, sure of success in her splendid figure and fine voice, for no other purpose than the humiliation of Horton. But she abandoned this as inapplicable at present. The question remained: had she any chance of successfully contesting an action for divorce? Her memory, not her conscience, quickly replied that she had none whatever. She remembered too many open works of darkness to entertain the faintest hope from such a course. There was one other thing too which she hardly acknowledged to herself, but which through all this maze of thought was ever present to her

mind, and influenced every idea. It was the sense that the time drew near when she would be a parent—and a parent of what? There was no hope. She could not fight—her steps were fettered on every side:

‘ Not only what we suffer, what we *do*  
Fetters our course of life upon its way.’

One only thing remained, and that was to drag with her as many to ruin as possible, and like Samson to involve her enemies in her own destruction. What was her best plan? how could she insure the infliction of the most pain upon them all? There was Heloise; how cut her to the quick and cover her with shame? There was Horton; how humiliate him, and expose his age to sneer and contempt? How at the same time secure to herself the greatest measure of security from poverty? After deliberate thought and anxious consideration, it seemed to her that she could best succeed in all these points through the agency of Louis. He should go with her; he should elope with her. That would at once fell Heloise to the ground with



bitter shame and misery. More than that, it might even lead to Heloise's own disgrace. Wretched, humiliated, demoralised by this open desertion on Louis's part, Heloise might succumb to the temptations of Noel, and soil her own purity. Also, in all probability, Heloise's friends would insist upon her suing for divorce; after Louis was divorced, she, Carlotta, could marry him. With all her subtlety, Carlotta here made a mistake, or at least raised a nice point: Louis could not marry his deceased wife's sister legally; how then could he marry his wife's sister while his quondam wife was still living? But to set that on one side, as it did not occur to Carlotta at the time. For the present Louis could support her; his means were ample. She might move in very little less splendour and indulge in very little less extravagance than she had been accustomed to. On all these grounds Carlotta determined upon attaching herself to Louis. He should accompany her; he should be the partner of her fall. Once decided upon this course, the question next

arose, how to secure his attendance? Should she send for him; show him Horton's letter; throw herself upon his breast; confess her dependence; and conjure him by the pledge of their guilty love soon to see the light to stand by, and to accompany her flight?

Carlotta actually sneered at herself as she drew this not unnatural picture in her own mind. She knew Louis better; she knew that the old cynic would turn from her the moment she displayed anything approaching to feeling. To secure him she must contrive to surround herself with the *éclat* and the subtle attraction of a splendid wickedness. She did not despair of playing the part to perfection. Her spirits began to rise again, now that it all resolved itself into the mere pleasure of deceiving a man. Her crest rose; her bosom heaved with a proud consciousness of power. This was her plan: first she would intoxicate him with the delight of her beauty; she would dress as she had never dressed before; she would please his eye, his taste; his connoisseurship should be bewildered with her

supreme loveliness. Gradually she would confess to him that her love for him was greater than words could tell; playing upon his vanity till he lost his head. Then she would rouse his hatred of Heloise, and hold out to him the prospect of divorce from her. Since they could not induce her to commit herself he could commit himself, which would lead to the same desirable result. She would inflame him with a bitter hatred against Heloise, and hold out to his cynical and devilish temper the opportunity of heaping coals of fire on Horton's head. She would dazzle him too with her wealth; she would whisper to him that the 100,000*l.* of her jointure was entirely at her own disposal; he would readily believe her, remembering her enormous expenditure. She would display her jewels, her unsurpassed diamonds. These would allay any dread as to cash and annoyances which might arise in his mind. But above all she counted most on the intense though secret pleasure she knew he would feel in the sense of his own inordinate attractions. To elope with a

peeress, the wife of a millionaire, the guest of empresses and queens, the admired, the much talked of, the very centre of society! He to do this, the *éclat* would secure him safe—certain.

And she did this. Why dilate on that scene, that interview, in which Carlotta outplayed Cleopatra, and hoodwinked the sharp wits of a man trained in the blackleg diplomacy of the lowest saloons of Europe and America? Louis agreed; and gloried in the idea.

It was a strange and never-equalled elopement. Carlotta coolly took the tidal train for Dover and Paris, passing through the very city where her husband was staying, and from thence to Venice, where she awaited Louis. Lord Fontenoy, having first calmly settled his affairs, and drawn a heavy sum from his bankers, followed her in about three days as if it was the commonest thing in the world. How contrasted to the usual hurry, the wild passion, the confusion of an elopement! In fact, it was merely a permanent assignation

on the other side of the Alps. Before leaving, this precious couple left a parting sting behind them, truly characteristic of their amiable disposition.

Carlotta wrote a note to Victor Knoyle, in which, with many expressions of endearment, she told him that out of her indiscreet attachment to him had arisen a coolness, and finally a disruption, between her and her husband. Thus her attachment for him had proved her ruin. On the other hand, his attachment for her had proved his; for his uncle had resolved to cut him out of his will, and had determined to reduce him to 300*l.* per annum. All this, she had no doubt, arose from the treachery of Francis. Thus she hoped to foment the quarrel between uncle, and nephew, and brothers; and to have at least one vassal at command. She conjured him not to believe in any scandalous stories that might be set afloat concerning her; she was going to a friend's in Italy, and she would write to his club and enable him to join her.

Louis on his part carefully composed the

following paragraph, which he sent to the fashionable morning paper, and which duly appeared, and was laid on every breakfast-table in Belgravia and Mayfair:

‘The most singular and exciting rumours have been current during the last two or three days concerning the destination of a lady and gentleman who have lately left the metropolis, *en route*, it is said, for the Continent. The lady, who is a peeress in her own right, and the spouse of one of those princes of specie who are the real rulers of the world, has long been renowned for the remarkable and fascinating beauty which has proved irresistible in the saloons of society for a lengthened period. Her beauty, her caprice, her extravagant expenditure, have centred an extraordinary amount of interest in her proceedings. The gentleman, who is a peer of the realm, and himself only recently married, as it appears, to the sister of the lady with whom he has now eloped, has also earned no little reputation for the eccentric, and at the same time cynical, composition of his



character. The most peculiar feature of this startling rumour is, that the elopement did not take place in concert, with the usual accompaniments of confusion, and under the cloud of night; but that each party quietly proceeded by different routes, and after an interval of some days, to the rendezvous, which is said to be some city in the north of Italy. This event, with the *exposé* which must eventually follow, promises to prove one of the most striking features of the season.'

Thus Louis secured the *éclat* of publicity.





## CHAPTER XIX.

SEASON after season the walls of Burlington House are hung with the works of artists in all varieties of skill: innumerable landscapes, portraits, historical scenes—memory cannot recall the kaleidoscopical changes rung upon the colours of the palette. They rest for a time upon these walls, and then pass away as the gorgeous clouds of sunset, in gold and crimson and bronze, linger a while in the west and finally sink into the darkness. Yet in all these innumerable pictures there are no two exactly alike; no two in which the colours are the same, the conception identical, the combinations of light and shadow precisely similar. Each artist lends his own ‘colour’ to his work; and so infinite are the resources of the mind, so infinite the possibilities of the soul, that perfect similitude is never found.

Our feeble powers of reckoning cannot conceive the numbers of human creatures existing at this present moment upon the earth. Ehrenberg, the great microscopist, was accustomed to say that the remains of two millions of once living and breathing insects might be found in a single cubic inch, I think it was, of mountain limestone. Take this cubic inch of stone in the hand, and one has a tangible realisation of the idea of two millions; this tiny square piece of solid stone represents them; it is the tangible idea. But it is not possible to apply this process to the human inhabitants of the globe. They cannot be estimated in the concrete. All that we can say is that they number so many hundred millions; a million of them cannot be held in the palm of the hand. And of all these, as Xerxes said, not one shall be alive in a hundred years; what incalculable numbers then, looking back, have existed upon the earth since time began! Every one of these beings more or less felt the influence of love, and not two of them in a similar manner. Each

and every one in the studio of the heart worked eagerly and enthusiastically at his painting, portraying an image called up by the instincts of his being. Yet no two of these pictures were alike.

Heloise's love for Noel was a love peculiar to her own nature. She had never loved Louis. A mere child, she had been interested in him, even dazzled by him, led onward too by the influence of Carlotta, whom she had not then learnt to distrust. When once her hand was given, then she never questioned, never analysed her feelings, but endeavoured, in so far as in her lay, to do and feel all that love could dictate towards Louis. So pure was her heart, so entirely unoccupied her imagination, that the thought of a lack of love never occurred to her. She had never known that emotion, and the want of it did not affect her. Thus it was that she did not recognise her sensations towards Noel as love. The idea of analysing them never struck her—she did not pause or think, but walked on her way as if through a garden of flowers, uncon-

scious of the yawning precipice beneath her feet. Partly this was Pierce's fault. He had trained her to be too unsuspecting. He had not taught her enough of that worldly wisdom which is essential in these days even to the most innocent of doves. As she trusted him, so she trusted others. She had no suspicion, neither of them nor of herself. Therein lay one of her greatest charms. The ladies of our day are so knowing. They look you through and through, and appraise you at your value. They count the buttons on your waistcoat, and spy out if the watch-chain be aluminium or pure gold. They see a trap in all your doings, a pitfall in your words. They are constantly *looking behind* you, as a cat will behind a looking-glass, to see what reality lies at the back of the reflection. But Heloise accepted the reflection, the image that met her eye in all good faith. So too she accepted her own emotions as good, and did not question or analyse them. You see, practically she had had no mother; that parent had died in her earliest infancy. She had been left to herself

and to Pierce. A mother would have inoculated her with an innate suspicion of the other sex. She would have been taught to ask herself what her feelings towards them were—to distinguish between the permissible and the non-permissible. Pierce had never thought of these things. Simple old man, such ideas had never occurred to him. He had trained Heloise up in all that was true and good and lovely in his mind. He had made her believe the true and the good; but he had not instructed her how to perceive the advance of evil. The mothers of our day do just the reverse; they instruct their daughters how to instantly detect the approach of the cloven foot, and therein consists the whole virtue they impart. Heloise asked herself no questions. Just as with Louis in the early days of their marriage she had revelled, absorbed in the beauty and pleasure and excitement of the theatre, oblivious of all else; so now she gave reins to the most exquisite pleasure of Noel's society, and never once said, 'Is this good? Is it right?' Do not judge her too



harshly. Even now she was but a child, barely twenty in years; hardly seventeen in ideas, in knowledge of the world. Louis, remember, had not taught her any of this knowledge; he had only sneered at her lack of it. But she was married—a matron; she should have remembered that sacred tie. Heloise had not been taught, as the daughters of the day are taught, the supreme importance, the overwhelming sanctity of that contract. She had had practically no mother; no one to invest the ceremony of marriage with all its full mystery and title to reverence; no one to show her how to fold her hands, and bow the head, and kneel down and worship the idol. Her education had been lamentably neglected. We Protestants sneer at the Roman Catholics because they say that the simple word of the priest transforms the consecrated wafer into the body of the Lord. Yet our mothers most religiously impress upon their children's mind, training them up from the earliest infancy to the belief, that the breath of the priest saying the marriage words trans-

forms them into something essentially different—absolutely new—from what they were before. By this magical mystical ceremony they are born again—renovated—transformed—utterly metamorphosed. They are no longer what they were before. Their very inmost being is changed. And so deeply is this creed *worn* in and engraved into the faith of the daughters, that the latter, reading these lines, will no doubt exclaim that of course it *does* alter them. Now, pray, in what way? Do they not possess the same souls as before? or does the miracle-working ceremony endow them with a new soul? Have they not the same hearts, the same organs, hands, feet, features? In what then does the change consist? Purely mythical and imaginary. That it is so, that it is purely imaginary, you may learn from Heloise. She had never been taught these curious lessons. She had not the slightest idea that after marriage she was supposed to be composed of entirely different elements; not the faintest suspicion that she was expected to be metamorphosed. The con-

sequence was that she did not in any way attempt to repel the impact of emotions pleasant to herself. Just as she would have welcomed them when living the old life at Avonbourne, so she welcomed them now, and rejoiced and was happy exceedingly. You see that no magical change, no wonderful mystical renovation and new birth had taken place in her. Noel was not long in perceiving the change that had come over the spirit of his reception. He was no longer merely *received*, he was *met*. He could not but mark the sparkle in her eye, the pressure of her hand, the slight flush upon her cheek, the flutter of her manner. And he gave himself up to these. He was a man of few companions.

His time had been spent in perpetual warfare, the warfare against the wilderness of the hunter and explorer. He had had no chance nor desire to make to himself a wide circle of acquaintances. He had a club, but rarely used it; therefore it was that, when in London, his time hung heavily upon him. He had no amusement here—he was out of place.

When he saw Heloise, and grew gradually enamoured of her, it followed that he devoted the whole of his time to her. There was nothing to call him away, nothing to distract his attention. It would have had no permanent result if there had been; but such things might have caused a delay. As it was, he gave himself up entirely to Heloise. He could not be always with her in person, but she was always with him: in the morning, in the day-time, in the silence of the night, she was ever at his side. The man loved with all the fierce tropical heat of his nature; the same savageness—if such a phrase may be used—which drove him on through untold dangers and difficulty, from one end to the other of Africa, now drove him headlong onward in this career of passion. A new world was opening to him. Till now the hemisphere in which he had moved had been one in which the greatest pleasure had been the exercise of the bodily powers—the glory and glow of labour—the wild delight of the chase—the stern resolution which overcame hunger

and thirst, braving all in the pursuit of one object. The world of thought and feeling—perhaps more particularly the latter—had been a closed book to him. At two-and-thirty he was a mere boy, a youth, in these matters. He had never loved before—he had never even flirted. This was wonderful indeed in this age of drawing-room passion, of carpet adoration. The reason of it existed in the immense physical development of the man. He found it impossible to stay indoors. The air, the sunlight, even the bitter frost, were a necessity to him; he revelled in it, he bared his chest to it, his mighty muscles rushed to meet it. The vigour of the man forbade his pursuit of the ordinary amusements of budding manhood; which amusements are these: to rise at eleven for twelve; to languidly breakfast at noon; to dawdle away the morning (!); to ride in the Park at five; eight, dine: the chief business of the day between seven and eight, and at all times, to follow wherever petticoats do show.

To Noel such a life was simply impossible.

He did not despise it; in point of fact, he never thought about it. He broke away clear at once, and never returned. Thus it was that he, strong man as he was, was nearly as foolish as Heloise in these matters. It never occurred to him in what light his constant visits and his evident devotion to Heloise might be seen by society, for the very plain reason that he hardly understood what 'society' meant. So without check, under the unconscious shelter of Georgiana's friendship, these two pursued their way, getting hourly more and more entangled in the inextricable web which men call love. Heloise was so very, very happy; everything seemed so delicious just at that time—the mere fact of existence was an inexpressible pleasure; she said so to Georgie. Profound and philosophical Georgie said that this feeling arose from her state of convalescence. In good truth, it was the dawning of a new moral and spiritual life, not the renewal of the physical and tangible. Once more, as she had done in the olden time at Avonbourne—only so much more intensely



now—Heloise saw beauty in everything. The very apples on the poor old costermonger's truck, as it was wheeled along before the door in the street, had a glory and a beauty about them. The lovely tints of gold and red and green, so delicately intermingling, and lit up with the last departing rays of the autumn sun, shone out with a splendour in its ray equal to those luscious fruit-scenes which painters love to limn. The sunlight of her love lit up everything upon which it fell with hues and tints borrowed from her own soul. She moved in a dream—a dream that ever grew more absorbing, that abstracted her day by day more and more from the outward and visible world, till she dwelt in the circle of her own consciousness, utterly unaffected by the passing of time;—a dream from which the rude hands of fact and fate were on the very verge of awakening her.

Georgie had stayed the night. The morning paper had been placed on the table as usual, but no notice had been taken of it. The day passed away till in the afternoon Ne-

ville and Noel came in together. Neville had seen the paragraph written by Louis; he had heard too at his club the interpretation the world put on it, and a few inquiries had elicited the fact that it was only too true. He had immediately started to tell Georgie, and had been met and joined by Noel. Neville said nothing to his brother; for in good truth he, and he alone, half suspected his attachment to Heloise. At any other time he would have endeavoured to turn Noel's thoughts into another channel: but then he was too occupied with Georgie—he half suspected it, but he did not plumb the depth. But now at this crisis he held his tongue. So they arrived at Heloise's—the one knowing too much, the other in ignorance, chatting gaily.

Neville saw Georgie, and told her all. Georgie broke it to Heloise. Just at that very moment it so chanced that Noel in impatience had wandered from the reception-room, and came upon them. Heloise's face—pale as death, with an indescribable expres-

sion of mute and fearful questioning—struck a chill to his heart, and he paused at the door. In a moment the poor lip—the lip with the scar—began to tremble ; she tottered, and would have fallen had not Georgie caught her. ‘O, take me to papa !’ she cried, while a few tears forced themselves out and rolled down her cheek. Noel, in alarm, had sprung forward, and forgetting all in the excitement of the moment, he was about to take her in his embrace, when a shudder passed through her frame, she recoiled from him with horror in her face, and motioned him away. ‘Leave us,’ said Georgie, ‘she is ill.’ Much wondering, Noel went.

In that hour a sense of what she had been doing—not a full, but an awakening sense of her own guilt—had rushed upon Heloise’s mind. Louis was guilty, but was she innocent ? She remembered Noel, and her conscience smote her. The scales fell from her eyes, and she saw the incipient crime she had been committing. Thus it was that she shrank from Noel. On him too, when he

learnt from Neville the truth, there fell a dark shadow, which dulled and deadened the indignation he would otherwise have felt against Louis. He marvelled at himself that he did not feel that indignation. He asked himself why; and his conscience taunted him with a secret joy that Louis had left her. A shadow of guilt fell upon him. He recognised his moral criminality: he started, and he recoiled, but it was for the moment only. Noel had never been accustomed to control his desires. His heart beat fast, and there was a giddiness in his head; but the strong purpose held good in his heart of hearts, and he knew it. Heloise must be his—as the very words of the Prayer-book put it—for better for worse, for richer for poorer.





## CHAPTER XX.

WITH Pierce at Avonbourne it was summer the whole year round. Not the hot glaring summer of the middle of June; but the sunshine lingered with him in the drear days of November. It lingered with him for this reason: that he studied how to catch it, how to retain it. His winter-room faced the south, and opened upon his garden, the garden where the birds congregated; only this portion of it was enclosed with high walls, and these walls hidden with thickest hedges of cropped yew-trees. Thus it was that the reflection from the house of the rays of the sun whenever it shone, and the total exclusion of all winds and draughts, rendered this small square plot of ground, carefully laid down with thick tiles, warm even in winter. The great window let in every particle of

warmth and heat and light ; but the projecting balcony over it sheltered it from the driving rain, and the double shutters and the thick red curtains made it cozy, and impenetrable to wind at night. In this tiled courtyard Pierce could walk even when the cold winds of November howled around the place. At this window he could sit when the white November sun shone out for a few moments, and enjoy its warmth, perceptible even then. The beams of the sun lingered lovingly on his grand old head, and cast its shadows on the broad folio pages which were his delight and study. I shall not stay to tell how Pierce received Heloise when she came one day unexpectedly, just as Carlotta had done, rushing to him in her misery and disgrace. His darling—how could he receive her but in one way? There was a time when even in his breast there smouldered an anger and a hatred, a just anger and a just hatred, against the destroyer of her peace. There was an involuntary clenching of the fingers, and the teeth ground together. Why did he not la-



ment for Carlotta?—his own daughter, too, remember. He knew that she had inherited her mother's nature, the mother who had made his life a hell. He hesitated to pity her, for he was not certain that she had not been the ringleader. These were days of tumultuous passions—days of whirl and excitement, in which all normal conditions were reversed. But after a while the long peace of his mind came back again. He had been in a state of repose too many lengthy years for even this hurricane of infamy to do more than ruffle the surface, and then die away in waves following each other at longer and longer intervals—the ground-swell of the mind. Shall we own it?—the presence of Heloise, unhappy as she was, had something to do with it. *She* was with him again. There was a fond, an inexhaustible, though secret delight in that. Georgie had accompanied her, and stayed at Pierce's pressing request, not only out of her own desire to do so, but because she saw the imperative need that Heloise had then of feminine companion-

ship. Even the affection of Pierce, deep as it was, could not altogether supply what Heloise wanted then. She begged Georgie to stay so piteously that the latter could not refuse. Hence she wrote to Neville, and asked him to come down to her own estate. That estate was not four miles from Avonbourne. When her father died, knowing that his eldest son's children were provided for—for that son had succeeded in his profession—and knowing, too, that the younger Horton was rich, beyond all need of help, he left his small property entirely to Georgiana. It was while visiting his aged parents that Horton Knoyle first saw Carlotta, and felt her fatal fascination. So it was that Knoylelands, as it was called, was but four miles from Avonbourne: and so Georgiana, anxious to have Neville near her—anxious, too, for her happiness—asked him to come down there while she stayed with Heloise. He could see her then easily. In the proximity of Knoylelands there existed the latent possibilities of infinite mischief; for when Georgie asked Neville there,

she once again left out of sight the fact that Neville had a brother, and that that brother was Noel. But for the present there fell a lull upon them. Heloise, shaken to the core, sorely needed rest and quietness ; and where could she get that rest and quietness so well as in the old, old house, with the familiar things around her, with Pierce ever near ?—Pierce, to whom she clung as the frail creeper clings to the decaying tree, weak though its support may be. He was no true father, no loving parent, this Pierce, you will say, else he would have followed the guilty pair, and have drawn down vengeance upon them. Vengeance upon them—upon his own eldest daughter, upon the husband of his youngest—would you have had this ? Or would you have had him go into the courts of law, and rake up the details of this miserable drama of evil passions for the delectation of all the prurient perusers of the papers, for the gratification of the million ? Carlotta reckoned wrongly when she calculated that Pierce, with his detestation of evil, would at once

take proceedings to procure a divorce. For Pierce, though he was a father, had in all these years of life learnt to be something a little more than man. Yes; let it stand as it is written. He had learnt to be something a little higher than man. Even to him this sudden revelation of wretchedness—it was as much to be considered wretchedness as detestable crime—had proved too great a strain at first. The old passions, the hot blood of youth, was not so completely dead but that there rose up a little of the rebellious spirit, rebelling against this terrible and never-to-be-recovered fall. But after a while it passed away, and the old peace came back upon him. Then there ensued a remorse, yes, an actual regret, that in his heart he had cursed them. He blamed himself: he saw that he too was guilty, in that he had given way to his anger and to his hatred. For Pierce had a belief, inconceivable to those who do not possess the metaphysical faculty, who are so absorbed by the outward things of this world, by what is written, and printed, and preached,

that they cannot retire into themselves and calmly examine the truth. Not only inconceivable, but even heretic and wrong: a belief founded upon no creed or religion whatever, be it Pagan, Christian, or what not. As such it is difficult to convey it faithfully and to do him full justice. Words are so treacherous. All must have had experience of that. One writes a letter to a friend; there is a phrase in it of which one took no note at the time of penning it. Yet that phrase is caught up by the friend, and bitterly resented, and it is of no use to say that one did not mean it. So here, in endeavouring to write out this belief of Pierce's in words that shall convey offence to no one, it is difficult to do so without penning a phrase which some one or other will take offence at. Broadly, his faith was this: that there was no crime, no evil; that man could do no wickedness. In these times, as for many centuries, the very name of Epicurus is held synonymous with all the sensual indulgences which flesh is capable of. The term epicurean is one of reproach, of con-

tempt ; a term of luxurious and carnal meaning. Yet those who have read all that remains of that truly great and wise philosopher know full well that his system—the creed which he taught—was in no way conducive to such a belief. Only he, or some one unfortunately for him, summed up his theories in the short and epigrammatic sentence : that the chief good was pleasure. This therefore the evil-disposed seized upon and put into practice in their own corrupt and sensual manner. Whereas, declare Epicurus's own disciples, there never lived a man of purer and holier life ; and what he intended to convey was that the chief good consisted in rational enjoyment, and principally in contemplation. But with all due deference to these same disciples, and to the glosses and commentaries of a later age, there is very sufficient reason to believe that Epicurus truly enough *did* mean that the chief good *was* pleasure, and pleasure of any and whatever description. But since he was a philosopher, and one of holy and pure life, and a man accustomed to metaphysical and



ethical discourse, it still remains to be discovered what was the true meaning he in his own mind attached to this most unfortunate phrase. Let us throw upon it the light of modern science. Darwin informs us that the chief aim of all plants and animals is to develop themselves, to so expand and increase their size and extent as to reach to the fullest organisation which nature has made them capable of. And nature has so endowed both the animal and the plant with sensations contrived to act as incentives to thus expand and develop themselves. Such are the sensations of eating and drinking—the plants throw out their leaves and roots for that very purpose—and these incentives consist of a pleasure in performing those functions which lead to expansion and development. From this we see Epicurus's own true meaning. The grand design of the Contriver of the universe is the perfection of the whole of His creation, and that perfection is reached through the development of each individual. That development is attained through the

incentives to pleasure, which its peculiar organs make it capable of procuring. It was in this sense that Epicurus said that the chief good was pleasure, since it led to the fulfilment of the design of the Deity.

Pierce applied this principle to his own daily life, and examined it as applied to the daily life of the multitudes around him, and to the whole social structure. He saw men drink and get drunk. This, society declares, is a crime. Our own sense of right and wrong declares that it is a crime. But what is drinking? It is one of those incentives to physical development; for without drinking no human being can survive. So too with all the physical passions. But murder, robbery, and so on? All these, argued Pierce, are committed through some belief on the part of the criminal that thereby he shall attain a certain pleasure, a certain better position. They are all striving for something better. The most coarse and brutal pleasure is in reality, when traced to its source, but a vague and rude aspiration towards a higher

state. Of this higher state the man may have no conception ; but he has the *instinct* to long for it. His action may destroy his chance of attaining it ; yet that action was nevertheless though involuntarily done with that view. Now the great God of the universe is so wondrously, so inexplicably great and grand, that no human intellect can fathom His marvellous wisdom. It may, then, be just possible that since He has impressed these instincts upon man—this instinct to rise—that in His sight and before Him there may be no crime and no sin. Considered as man towards man, there is sin and crime ; but in the celestial and before God there may be none whatever. For these evil things exist and go on day by day, notwithstanding that ‘God so loved the world that He sent His only Son ;’ notwithstanding, too, that God is illimitable in power, and that He is directly opposed to evil. Plato had shown, thousands of years before, that this God could neither originate nor connive at evil. Hence it followed that in the abstract, and when entirely

taken out of all human consideration, there can be no evil, and no crime, and no sin. These only exist in the relations between man and man; there are none such in the sight of the great Designer. That such is the case there is the example of the Lord, who pardoned the very woman taken in adultery—in the very act. She had sinned towards man, but to Him she had not sinned. Let the mind for a moment raise itself above human considerations and social relations. Consider our position towards the lower animals. We slay them day by day; and not only when absolute necessity drives us, but for pleasure. In the eye of the Maker of these creatures this too must be sin, if there were any. But let it not be thought that Pierce would therefore in any way connive at crime in man. Only he hesitated to judge. He withheld himself from that great and awful office. Even in his own house, in the secrecy of his own heart, he tried, in so far as in him lay, not to forgive those who had injured him, but to abstain from judging them, to abstain

from saying in his soul, 'These have sinned.' This was Pierce's creed. This was what he had for years impressed upon himself. This, again, on the considerations of delicacy, was the reason why he did not follow or in any attempt to chastise the guilty pair.

Safe at Avonbourne, Heloise heard nothing of the storm of surprise, of sneer, of witticism that passed over 'society' when the flight of Carlotta with Louis became generally known. It was a sensation such as could not die out in a day. Georgie rejoiced that she had come down into the country. She was so closely related to one of the actors in the drama, that she felt as if the arrows of criticism would whistle very near her.

END OF VOL. I.

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## RESTLESS HUMAN HEARTS.

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### CHAPTER I.

ALTHOUGH Knoylelands was barely four miles distant, of course Neville found it very different from what it had been in London. He could only see Georgiana at intervals. Pierce welcomed him at Avonbourne, but still he felt that he could not intrude there at the present unfortunate time; so that the only occasions on which he saw Georgie were when she came over to Knoylelands, or when they met by appointment. He missed the ready and easy intercourse of London; there was a void; he could not look forward with certainty to seeing Georgie in the evening, or indeed even in any particular week. He had brought his books and papers with him, and at first he had deluded himself into the belief

that the quiet repose of a country mansion, only inhabited by himself, where he could indulge free of observation in each and every one of his own peculiar little ways and habits, would be favourable to study, and that he should really enjoy it. He found himself strangely mistaken. It was not that it was dull, or that he found its solitude oppressive. What other people called dull had through life been a pleasure to him. He detested excitement, he hated parties, and everything appertaining to what is called amusement. He never went to balls, suppers, dinners; in short, he never went anywhere: fond as he was of music, he never went to a concert.

Essentially Neville was a man who lived in himself; not that he was selfish, but, on the contrary, foolishly generous with his money. Certainly he was polite and well-bred—the reverse of the boorish recluse. He had no feeling of contempt or dislike for any other person; he even sometimes began to wonder if it was not he himself that was worthy of contempt for this very love of solitude. The truth was, that he lived in dreams;



his mind was constantly occupied in weaving visions, if that can be understood. They were not always mere fancies or imaginings; they were frequently hard calculations, abstract reasonings in mathematics, though often enough purely and simply dreams, in which he constructed a state of things sublimated, as it were, from the actual realities of life. In his own mind he had created an ideal world, and peopled it with innumerable beings, which were tangible enough to him; and amongst these he dwelt. The approach of other persons distracted these mental fabrics—they fell down and were destroyed before the jar of a coming footstep. It was like looking at one's face in a basin of water. So long as there is perfect stillness—a complete absence of volition—the surface of the mobile liquid acts as a reflector, and mirrors every feature with distinctness; but the slightest jar or shake, the trembling of the floor caused by a heavy footfall, disturbs it, ruffles the water with miniature waves, and the image is a blurred and shapeless distortion. It required the most perfect repose, a total

immunity from the most minute irritation, to enable the mind—that extremely subtle and mobile thing—so to settle and become smooth, as to reflect upon its surface, clear to his internal sight, the image of those thoughts and dreams which arose in his soul. The very tiniest motion, the smallest sound, the very faintest disturbance, immediately upset the fragile and delicately-balanced mirror, and the image was in a moment a broken and disfigured mass.

Neville had grown to enjoy the utmost pleasure in the perfection of this ethereal picture-painting. It was a species of mental opium-eating. The noise of a fashionable party, the incessant excitement, the constant succession of fresh faces, the utter absence of anything approaching to repose, irritated his nerves, and he could not settle down to his own internal amusement. They were constantly tearing his web as fast as he wove it, destroying its contour, and blotting its beautiful colours. Solitude was to him only another world, filled with creatures and with shapes as far superior to the realities of life

as the mind is to the matter which supports it. He welcomed the quiet and complete retirement of Knoylelands, as a place where he could indulge to the very utmost, and without the least dread of interruption, in this lotos-eating. He dignified it to himself by the name of 'study.' For a few days all went as he expected; the very driving of the rain against the window, and the rise and fall of the wind as it howled around the house, produced a somnolent complacency, particularly favourable to that species of reverie in which he delighted to indulge. After a day or two he grew a little restless; in a week he did nothing but walk up and down, and venture out of doors till the ceaseless rain drove him in. It was not the solitude nor the dulness that made him thus; it was the want of Georgie. Previously he had not recognised what a large portion of the quiet enjoyment he had hitherto felt in life had arisen from the constant intercourse he had had with her. She had become necessary to him; without her he could settle down to nothing—not even to dream. When Georgie did at last

come and stay with him a few hours, he made use of the opportunity to persuade her, with all his powers, to join their fates and hands at once, for he said that then they could be always together; and he explained to her how impossible it was to him to study, or to feel any pleasure in his old pursuits, without her presence. She could not but feel an amount of pleasure in this eager desire for her society, yet it terribly embarrassed her. She had not yet perfected her plan, nor had she yet gathered sufficient courage to communicate it to him, incomplete as it was. Neville saw her depart without having succeeded in moving her one jot, and saw himself again reduced to the companionship of his books, from between whose covers the soul that used to rise up to meet his glance had fled, leaving nothing but cold dry letters, whose meaning he could not grasp.

Have you never written an address upon an envelope, while at the same time thinking of something else, and then trying to read it, found it for a moment meaningless? The letters convey no idea, not even the idea of

a certain sound—they are black splotches—nothing more. The printed lines of his books were thus to Neville. Suddenly it struck him that he would ask Noel down; Noel would cheer him with his talk, perhaps he would even entice him out with a gun or on horseback. Neville had a certain amount of love for field sports, but it halted at love; it never arrived at action unless some one dragged him into it.

Noel came only too willingly: he should be near Heloise—perhaps he should see her. To him the last fortnight had been positive misery; he had no resources, no books, no favourite studies, no day-dreams to which to fly, when the events of the hour left him to himself. And we have seen that even these resources were of very little avail to studious Neville. His more vigorous brother knew knew not what to do. He wandered about town like a spectre, restless night and day. He began to have foolish ideas of going down into the country near Avonbourne, lodging at one of the roadside inns, and walking daily in sight of Bourne Manor. That would at

least be something to do ; this waiting was maddening. Naturally he snatched at Neville's invitation.

As Neville had expected, they were speedily out of doors on horseback together. By chance, or by a mysterious instinct, they rode close by the old manor-house, close to Pierce's garden. Here, too, was Neville's hope. Thus it came about that day after day, by common consent, they passed that way ; always talking of the most indifferent matters, each in his heart full of one shape and one well-beloved face. They never called ; but of course the proximity of two strange gentlemen could not long remain a secret. It became known at Bourne Manor that not only Neville, but his brother, was staying at Knoylelands, and Pierce of course had already fathomed the attachment existing between Georgiana and Neville. Anxious to pleasure his guest, who had been so kind to Heloise, Pierce, always ready to be hospitable, lost no time in inviting them to visit him,—than which, of course, nothing was more natural. On the two first of these occasions it so chanced that



Heloise was not visible; in truth, she had purposely secluded herself, not from any feeling of shame or humiliation, but because of the secret conscientiousness in her own heart; but on the third Noel saw her. This was early in December, when Pierce asked them to join in a pheasant battue. With one of those singular inconsistencies which mark human nature, Pierce, the protector of the timid creatures in his garden—the humane and the gentle—was passionately fond of field sports, be it hunting, shooting, or fishing. His shooting parties were acknowledged to be the best in the county, the preserves were so well stocked, and the host was so courteous and so thoroughly *en rapport* with his friends. But this year Pierce had issued no general invitations; the cloud that had overshadowed his house forbade anything approaching to a public entertainment. There were only a few old friends asked, and out of deference to Georgiana, Neville and Noel. The first of these disgraced himself for ever. Beyond barking a few ash-poles with his shot, and peppering a dog, poor Neville hit nothing that

he knew of. Yet he handled his gun in true sportsmanlike fashion: he did not point it at his neighbours, or endanger the lives of the beaters. He came of a sporting stock, and the blood would show even in this unbroken descendant; but he hit nothing whatever. Noel, on the contrary, a practised shot, distinguished himself beyond all others. He had had no shooting for some time: soon as he smelt the powder the old instincts rose in him savage and fierce; he forgot Heloise—he forgot all, save the wild delight of destruction, the maddening pleasure in one's own skill. His shooting was superb; the old gamekeeper swore with an oath that he had seen nothing like it since he was a lad. Pierce was delighted. Then, in the evening, when Noel was fêted and made much of as the hero of the day, his latent powers of conversation came out again as they had done when Heloise unlocked his lips. She was then ever listening to him; what he spoke of now he had never alluded to before. Those tales that he had related to her were mere stories of adventure, wild and picturesque, but un-

stained with the blood of others than the beasts of the forest.

Now among men—in the company of those who had shared the brutal sport of the morning, who had dipped their hands with him in the blood of hundreds of innocent and timid creatures, who had thus partaken of ‘fetish’ with him—*now* the inner nature of the man came out. He told them of his wars, of the horrible deeds of the man-hunters of Western America with whom he had lived and worked; of the slow and patient following of the trail of the doomed Indian, the gradual concentration of the beaters in an ever-narrowing circle, as a vast serpent slowly and silently glides after its prey, and then surrounds it within its gigantic folds.

But why linger on these narratives? It is enough to indicate them, without polluting the page with blood. A fierce light shone in his eyes. Heloise had entered the room with a deadly paleness and trembling limbs. The sense of guilt clung to her like the folds of a wet garment, hampering and destroying her natural grace. The company amongst whom,

she mingled were far too highly bred either to treat her with the extreme deference which is the common mode of meeting misfortune, or to ignore her with the idea of putting her at her ease. All that they did was to make her feel that to them she was still the Heloise of the olden time—as welcome, as innocent, and as well beloved. Nevertheless her shyness, her labouring awkwardness did not wear off, for Noel was there. He had barely touched her hand, he had but murmured the simplest words demanded by courtesy, yet he had thrilled her to the innermost heart. She could no longer meet him with the open brow and the ready smile, bold in the innocence of her mind. The first pair in the Garden of Eden, so soon as they felt the consciousness of guilt, hid themselves among the trees and clothed themselves with leaves. In like manner Heloise faltered and recoiled; the firmness, the frank openness of her mind was gone. Even Georgie noticed this, but put it down to the remembrance of the elopement of Louis, and did not therefore wonder at it. Neville too attributed it to the same cause.

But when Noel late in the evening began to talk thus, her embarrassment wore off. The sound of his well-remembered voice, the dear tones that had roused up the echoes of her heart, passed like waves over her soul, and washed away the weeds and choking sandbanks that had begun to raise their heads above the waters. She forgot all but him. She hearkened to him wonderingly. Her lips parted slightly, her cheek faintly flushed, her eyes glittered. Why was it that Heloise, the gentle, the timid, listened thus with rapt attention to these tales of fiercest bloodshed? She never analysed the morality of his deeds. They were *his* deeds. Their cruelty, their brutality did not occur to her; they were glossed over by the eagerness of her mind. She felt as he felt; the danger rose up before her and confronted her, and her mind followed out his plans to escape from it with thrilling interest. It was Noel—not the blood he had shed—that drew her with unutterable interest. If any conception of the character of these deeds did ever pass across her thought, it was only to give rise to a sense of wonder,



of marvelling delight in *his* prowess, his terrible arm, his unerring eye. The glamour of love was over her, and the sound of his voice mingled that night with her feverish dreams.

Pierce himself, carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment—admiring the brilliant shooting of his guest, and gratified by the evident interest of his friends—overlooked the savageness, the inhuman ferocity of these doings in far-off lands, and forgot their true character. Out of Noel's narrative there had sprung anecdotes and touches of observation which had excited Pierce's interest. On the morrow he questioned Noel ; and Noel, eager to please Pierce, and so to obtain a footing in the house, bent his mind to recollect what he had seen of nature and nature's ways in the dense jungle of Africa and the primeval woods of the New World. This fascinated Pierce. Ever a student of nature, yet scarcely even having stirred from his own country, Pierce dwelt with intense interest on the discoveries of this bold explorer. Aided by his questions, which suggested long-forgotten facts to his



memory, Noel laid before his host a wealth of new material almost bewildering.

This, and the delight that he showed in the sports of the field, in a few weeks made Noel the almost constant companion of Pierce. Together they strolled over the fields and the breezy downs, with the bitter wind beating in their faces—the old man of seventy winters stepping out in a pardonable vanity, proud of his own still strong vitality. Together they met in the evening smoking and talking, while Heloise by slow degrees grew once more accustomed to his presence, and the fatal ease of intercourse overcame the warnings of her conscience. Neville, only too glad of these opportunities to see Georgie, shut his eyes to what was going on, with the true selfishness of a genuine lover, and Georgie was blinded by his presence.





## CHAPTER II.

THERE came a time at last when Georgie, reluctant as she was, was compelled to give an answer to Neville's continual questionings and persuasions. He could not be put off for ever. He was ready to agree to any proposal she liked to make, to consent to anything so that only she would be his. How she told him she never could remember, and Neville was too much amazed to have any distinct recollection of the manner of the communication. But the matter of it was plain and evident enough. It was glaring, startling, something which could not be misunderstood. She wanted him to inaugurate a new era by marrying her for three years, and not for life. As it was impossible to do this legally, she proposed that they should take such steps to make the proceeding perfectly open and in the sight of all, so that the contract—though

it might want the consecration of the priest and the sanction of the State—might nevertheless be a good and true marriage in the eye of the world. This was what she at last conveyed to him, with many circumlocutions and much hesitation and stammering, for she was afraid that this extraordinary proposal would give him cause to suspect her maidenly modesty.

But Neville never thought of that; he was simply overwhelmed with amazement. Then he began to rapidly controvert her ideas, and to show the utter absurdity of her design, besides its thorough opposition to all the received canons of social relationship.

This course at once put Georgie on her mettle, and gave her a full flow of speech. As soon as it came to argument she was at home. Forgetting the personal application of the subject, she treated it as if it had concerned some one afar off and invisible. As to the mere novelty of the thing, that she declared was not the slightest reason against it; and as for the sensation it would cause in society, any rational being was of course quite indifferent to society. What on earth had

this intangible creation of men's minds, this vague and ill-defined cloud called 'society,' to do with her grand mission for the regeneration of her sex? What prophet, what reformer, what great name of the ages past had ever cared for 'society'? Invariably 'society' had been against them—not only in words and remarks, but in hard and cruel deeds. For facing these hard and cruel deeds, these tortures and these flames, these men had been dignified as martyrs, and were admitted to a niche in the world's Pantheon. If they could withstand the fierce and biting fire, the scorching tongues of flame that licked up the glorious human form as if it had been a heap of dried leaves, could not she, in the consciousness of a great cause, face the mere carpet inquisitions, the mere paltry sneers and criticisms of that miserably weak and childish aggregate of effete particles called 'society'? What had he ever seen in her to indicate that she lacked stability of character or firmness of purpose? What she preached that she was determined to practise, and openly before the world. There were thousands and thousands

of her sex who thought the same as she did, but whom the lack of stamina and the force of irresistible circumstances prevented from asserting themselves. She had all these things. She was firm and bold—ready to dare and resolved to bear the consequences. She had an independent fortune, not large, but sufficient for her wants. Not a human being could in any way hamper her proceedings. Of full age, with special powers under her father's will exempting her from any control—of a sound and vigorous mind, entirely unfettered by any prejudice—what better conditions could there be for such an assertion of woman's rights and woman's independence? She did not suggest they should sneak into this contract and hide themselves as if ashamed from the faces of their friends. Here her fair and excited face blushed a little. On the contrary, she wished it to take place openly, and with every accompaniment that could make the contract solemn and in every respect a true marriage. Very well she knew what some people would say—that, try how they might, they could never succeed in legalising

such a marriage; it must still be illegal, or rather unrecognised by the law. But truth was superior to law; right was better than technical routine. Ill-natured people would say that she was a 'mistress'—let them say so. Fully she recognised all these disagreeable, all these cogent objections; and she was determined to override them all. It was her belief that if two persons, man and woman, solemnly met together and pledged their troth in the presence of others, and with just sufficient ceremony to give a tangible reality to it, that man and woman were really and truly man and wife in the sight of Heaven. After all, what were these laws? They were certainly not inscribed on the tables that Moses took from the outstretched hand of Deity. Though undoubtedly in their spirit sanctioned by Heaven, the letter was purely a human invention; and she contended that the time had come when that letter should be altered. By taking this bold initiative, she should in one single step proceed farther on the road than hundreds and thousands of mere talkers could accomplish. The Fact would



preach with irresistible force. It would take root and spread. On what did she ground her adherence to the three-year system of marriage? On the plainest and most straightforward ground—that in that time the parties could ascertain if they were fitted for each other and if their anticipations were realised; and if so, they could then enter upon the contract for life; or if not, it was infinitely better that they should part. It was hardly necessary for her to allude to those painful events which had only recently taken place to illustrate this. As for the old superstition about the sacrament of marriage, and its being a juncture which no earthly power could destroy, she laughed it to scorn. If both the parties were heartily and cordially agreed to live together, and to remain in that condition of life in which they were, then she certainly believed that there *was* no earthly power, no tribunal or authority which could in any way interfere with their right to do so. That right was the very birthright of every human being. In that light, and under such conditions as these, the tie was sacred and could not be

separated. But, on the other hand, when either party found that the other was unsuited, or that their anticipations had not been realised, or that—not to particularise the reasons—there was a desire to part, then she held that no earthly power, tribunal, or authority had the right to compel them to dwell together, or to continue to merge their legal identity. Others—weak women—talked of this, and believed it, and sighed for it. Thousands of them sighed for it, for this reason: it would give such an impetus to marriage. Hundreds and hundreds—countless numbers—of marriages would take place, if there was the certainty that in a reasonable period, if disagreement arose, they could part. As it was, young men were naturally shy of matrimony. Now it was confessedly a lottery: her plan would reduce it to something approaching to rational investment.

Neville, knowing that it would be of no avail to contradict her flatly, or to attempt to draw her away from her conclusions, attacked her in detail. Suppose these parties married in such a system did not both agree in quar-

relling ; suppose one wished to be free and the other did not ; how meet that contingency ? Georgie replied that no person had a right to control another ; therefore, in such a case, the person who wished to remain in the married state must give way.

Neville was about to bring up the still more difficult question of possible children, but delicacy forbade him. Georgie seeing him pause, went on to attack him in return. They, Neville and she, were not required to lay down a piece of legislation so framed as to meet every possible emergency that might arise. They had but themselves to deal with ; therefore they need not waste their time in discussing how to arrange imaginary alternatives. No such discords would arise between them ; they should not disagree. ‘Then why not marry in the old way for life ?’ asked Neville. She quickly replied that it was the principle she stood up for. Nothing could move her from the principle.

And nothing could move her. Neville argued with her till he got angry. Then he left her. This he repeated day after day and

week after week ; till it seemed as if the controversy would lengthen into months. But it was in vain. And after a time, by the constant reiteration of her argument, aided by the pertinent remarks that occurred to her, she actually succeeded in making some impression upon Neville. He was obliged to admit her fundamental principles ; that was the worst of it ; that gave her such force, such a standpoint to make way against him. Accepting, as he had always done, the political theory which centres in the one word 'Liberty,' he could not conscientiously attempt to controvert the premises upon which she built her edifice. So that in time it came to this : he opposed her wishes upon one ground only ; and that was that as a man, as her lover, and her husband, he could not endure to hear her conduct spoken of slightly, or made a subject for sneering criticisms. For himself he did not care ; but for her. Out of this she partly argued him, partly laughed him, partly coaxed him. It is just possible that if in the first place he had given way to her, and offered to carry her whim into imme-

diate execution, that before the day came she would have wavered and paused. All this argument, all these discussions and persuasions only acted as a spur to thoroughly rouse up her energies, and to bend them with unflinching determination upon this one end. In the end it was her beauty that carried the day. Neville could not resist her when she resorted to the feminine arts of persuasion. Finally he yielded conditionally, that the 'marriage' should be solemnised with every possible outward show and ceremony that could make it a genuine one in the eyes of the world. He had a lingering hope that when it came to lawyers and settlements, and all the details of the subject, that she would recoil alarmed. Georgie readily assented to this condition; it was indeed her own wish, and part of her original plan. So it was settled between them.

Georgie had, however, yet to stand the fire of those friends, those immediate and intimate friends, to whom the project was disclosed. Pierce in his quiet gentle manner placed before her in striking colours the sin-

gular position in which she would be placed. His calm manner had far more effect upon her than all the ardent language of Neville had done. Heloise pleaded affectionately, begging her dearest friend not to take so dangerous a step. These two alone made any impression upon Georgie. They shook her a little. Her heart beat faster as she thought of them ; but though her senses might waver, her mind remained unchanged, firm as before.

This marriage now became the one topic of conversation at Avonbourne. After a while, so much talking, such constant consideration of the aspects of the matter had its natural effect upon them. They grew to look upon it as not so very much out of the way after all ; nothing so extremely astonishing and remarkable. The angularities of the idea wore off, if such a phrase may be used, and the strong points rooted themselves in their minds. It was spoken of as a topic no longer of weight or moment, but just as if it was an ordinary event. This tended to reassure Georgie, and to fill her with spirit to carry out her undertaking. There was but one



now who opposed it. This was Philip, Pierce's brother—the clergyman of the parish—who lived in the adjacent house. Philip ceased not day and night to do whatever he could to discourage this proceeding. He argued against it; he preached against it; he produced authorities against it. Filled with all the traditions of his Church, zealous even to officiousness, he reproved them in one breath, and endeavoured to persuade them in the other. In time they grew to be perfectly indifferent to him. Then in secret he changed his tactics: he said no more, but he resolved to do what he could to make the ceremony as binding as possible. In this matter he had a cordial though unpronounced friend in Neville. Between them they endeavoured so to arrange matters as to give the affair an aspect at least of being sanctioned by authority, even if it was not really so.

There had been a time, when in London, when Heloise had looked forward to her friend's marriage with delight and anticipation. She had talked of the dresses, of the bridesmaids, of the thousand-and-one details which ladies

alone can bear in mind. That was months ago. But now that it was rapidly approaching, and in a most singular and exceptionable manner, Heloise seemed to lose all interest in it. Even Georgie remarked this apparent coldness ; and Heloise, hurt at the idea of seeming indifferent to Georgie's fate, endeavoured to rouse herself, and fix her mind upon it. But Noel had been too potent. The very idea of a marriage brought up feelings which would not be controlled. This throbbing of her heart would not be stilled. Ah, Noel, Noel ! what mischief he had caused ! It was at this time that Philip, the clergyman who had been in private on the watch for these things, produced a copy of a London paper, in which the approaching event was alluded to in plain and not over-flattering terms : ' We hear that a remarkable marriage, which will signalise the commencement of a new era in the annals of matrimony, will be celebrated in the now fast-coming season. This marriage will present the novel and exceptionable peculiarity of being for three years only. As no such marriage is recognised by the law, it follows

of course that the parties to this contract can be under no binding engagement, and will be practically free to leave each other the very next week. Under the specious pretext of forwarding women's rights, this "new sensation" may captivate the novelty-seeking portion of the public; but those who possess the power of penetrating beneath the surface of things will feel unfeigned regret at a precedent which may be made to let in a flood of corruption.'

Georgiana laughed at all this, except the 'specious pretext.' That stuck by her—it was always before her. It rose up when she was alone—it confronted her, as the mystic writing on the wall confronted the astonished king. 'Specious pretext!' Was it just possible that she was deceiving herself? But she would not admit such a possibility. She shut her ears, determined not to hear. And the preparations went forward, and grew near completion.





### CHAPTER III.

THIS was how the formalities were arranged. The lawyers had been busy at them for some time, and many were the consultations before all parties were agreed. Out of the chaos of numberless suggestions an order was at length evolved. Georgiana's property consisted of the estate at Knoylelands, covering about eight hundred acres, and a very fine dwelling-house, lawns, and gardens. This was entirely her own; she could devise it by will to whomsoever she chose. Neville Brandon's sole estate was 20,000*l.* in Consols. It had originally been double that amount; but he had never paid the least attention to his monetary affairs, either to obtain a better interest, or to retain what he possessed. He had spent fully one-half of his fortune in his travels, and in prosecuting scientific researches at a great

cost. As the law could not be twisted in any way so as to sanction the marriage of these two for a limited number of years, they searched about for a way to bind them together by other means. Indirectly this could be accomplished through their respective properties. In other words, Georgiana Knoyle on the one part, and Neville Brandon on the other part, entered into partnership as a firm, and executed the proper deeds, and were duly registered and gazetted as such. The partnership was nominally to work and farm Georgiana's estate of eight hundred acres. She found the land, he found the capital; and thus the partnership became a real and genuine one. Such an engagement as this could be broken off at any time by consent; or if one objected, could be severed by his or her discharging all claims that the other had upon them. In this way there was a real, tangible, and substantial bond between Georgiana and Neville, entirely independent of and superior to any mere declaration they might make.

This bond was so far better and more in accordance with the fundamental principles of

justice than the legal effect of an ordinary marriage, that it was perfectly just to both parties. To provide for the possible advent of children, Neville executed a deed binding himself to allow a stated sum per annum towards the maintenance and education of the same, be they male or female. Up to ten years of age both sexes were to remain with the mother; after that the girls were to become, as it were, the absolute property of the mother and the boys of the father, who were each to be respectively responsible.

To meet the contingency of either party dying Georgiana also executed a deed (which she could do, as, not being legally married, she did not incur legal disabilities), leaving a proportion of her property to trustees for the education and maintenance of children. Neville did the same. So that in fact the money for the maintenance of children was in reality placed in the hands of trustees. Over and above this, it was, of course, competent to either party to devise their estates to any or all of the possible heirs; but the above arrangement was adopted as one pro-



tecting either party against any breach of faith by the other.

In the event of there being no heirs at the expiration of the three years, or within one year from that separation, these deeds were to become null and void. It was then open to either party either to renew them or to let them drop. The partnership could be dissolved at any time; but these other deeds held good for three years and the year of grace, which year of grace was provided in order to meet a possible contingency which will suggest itself to the reader.

Practically this partnership and these provisions for possible heirs were the only real bonds that all the ingenuity they exercised could devise. There remained only the ceremony. The lawyers rather pooh-poohed this part of the matter. It was quite superfluous, quite useless, and of no effect. They might just as well go at once and reside together; there was no other step they could take that would be of the least practical good.

Georgiana and Neville both thought very differently. As far as possible they were

determined to satisfy that traditionary requirement of society which demands that in all these great events of life there shall be a certain amount of ceremony — an outward show to exhibit the inner sentiments. Antiquarians may say that this is a remnant of the times when there were no records, when the art of writing was in a bald and imperfect state. To preserve the memory of an event as much ceremony as possible was gone through, and as great a crowd of persons collected together, so that there might be many witnesses, and that the fact might be widely spread and published. In fact such a gathering answered exactly the same purpose as the modern announcement in the newspapers.

The solicitors rather satirically remarked, for they neither altogether relished these irregular proceedings, that if one thing was done away with they might as well do away with all. If they could do without the sanction of the Legislature and without the sanction of the Church, why be so anxious to secure the approbation of the public? They might

just as well sign the deeds, drive to the railway, take their tickets, and start off to Paris for the honeymoon at once.

But Neville's idea was that more than a mere traditional prejudice existed under the popular faith in a certain amount of publicity and ceremony at these important events of life. His idea was that these ceremonies were the tangible outward signs, the manifestations of the internal and unseen thought.

They, he and Georgie, might each sit apart in different rooms and think over all those obligations towards each other which they were about to incur; and having so thought rise up and meet and go forth together into the world. But there was no responsibility about this; no other person was made acquainted with what their promises towards each other were. No one could be a witness to the fact that they had made such promises. The ceremony might in itself be a very ridiculous thing, considered *per se* and in the abstract, but it was a public declaration of responsibility. The law had in all times prescribed that no inten-

tion was complete till some act, often very trifling in itself, had been gone through; deeds for instance had to be completed, signed and sealed, before they had a legal force. The mere act of affixing a paltry piece of sticking substance to a sheet of parchment was in itself absurd; but it was an outward act or sign of the intention of the man. Therefore both he and Georgiana were resolved that there should be some amount of ceremony and some amount of publicity.

By this time Neville had grown thoroughly interested in the matter. Having once given his consent he threw his mind ardently into it. Since they were to do this thing they might as well do it in such a fashion as to set an example to all time, and to furnish a precedent which others might follow. Together with Georgiana he set to work to compose a new marriage service, adapted to the thought of modern days, and in accordance with the theory that man and woman were socially equal. It was in fact a draft of a new marriage service which future legislators might take as a model, and which they could alter

or improve upon—filling up the first imperfect outline with the lights and shadows of experience.

First they agreed that the law ought to be altered so as to give greater facilities to marriage. The document they drew up ran as follows, and was afterwards to be published in the form of a pamphlet:

‘The increasing population of these isles, and the varying phases of public thought, demand that the social contract of marriage should be greatly modified and simplified; and the spread of education of late years has been so great, that many of the cumbrous instruments which were necessary in an age of ignorance, and of slow communication, may safely be removed. At present it is not considered that the age at which marriage can be contracted by the simple will of the parties concerned should be reduced below the age of twenty-one years, as to do so would so largely interfere with the existing laws respecting property. But it is to be hoped that in the future these laws will be so modified as to allow of marriages under that

age without the necessity of obtaining any consent, and at least as early as eighteen, since the aforesaid higher education of this age must be held to make persons responsible agents much sooner than formerly, and therefore to entitle them to an earlier immunity from control.

‘ In these times, when almost every person can read, and when the day is rapidly approaching when the “almost” of this sentence may be omitted with truth, it behoves the legislature of the country to acknowledge this altered condition of affairs. Every person is now aware, from the information disseminated by the public press, that persons committing bigamy or marrying within the prescribed degrees, are either liable to severe punishment or the contract is null and void. Those requirements which were necessary in bygone times to prevent the recurrence of these offences are therefore now superfluous. Such are the publication of banns—with the power of forbidding the same, and so stopping a marriage—and the statutes requiring residence in the parish over a given period. This latter



is especially onerous and utterly opposed to the spirit and social life of a period in which such vast multitudes of people are compulsorily engaged in travelling ; and also when the easy and rapid means of communication permits engagements to be entered into at the distance of several hundreds of miles from home.

‘ With reference to the prevention of the crime of bigamy or the marrying within the prohibited degrees, since all persons may now fairly be held to understand that such practices are reprehensible, there can be no need of any enactments permitting other persons to step in and interfere. If they choose to declare that there is no affinity and to incur the penalty, they do so with their eyes open and wittingly ; and on this ground there can be no claim to retain these cumbrous processes.

‘ The power given to persons to stop the publication of banns, and thus to hinder, if not to prevent, the solemnisation of matrimony, is invidious to the liberty of the subject and opposed to the spirit of modern society. It is simply and solely a remnant of

that period when the feudal laws were in full force, when the lord could interfere with almost every step taken by his vassal; and it seeks to confer upon parents and trustees powers similar to these. If it practically fails in this respect, it does practically result in a great hindrance and loss of time. Therefore both the publication of banns and the residence for a given number of days in the parish ought to be done away with.

‘There is indeed no reason, apart from the dogmatical prejudice handed down from generation to generation, why marriage should not be as easy and as expeditious as the mere handing of a cheque for a sum of money to another and the cashing of the same, or of any other banking process.

‘The only canons that remain to be satisfied are these (granted of course that both parties freely consent): First, there should be a certain amount of publicity after the act. Secondly, that there should be some duly authorised person to perform the ceremony. Thirdly, that there should be a registration by the State. The last two of these canons

cannot be satisfied in our case; let us trust that they will be in the future.

‘The principle of the proceeding having been thus cleared of incumbrances and narrowed down to its true proportions, there only remain the technical formalities to be laid down. To arrive at these it is necessary to amplify the bare canons alluded to above. The authorised persons should be magistrates, lawyers, physicians, clergymen; and, in short, all persons who hold a recognised position, and diplomas proving that they possess a higher education than the mass of people. They should be empowered to solemnise marriage at any place and any hour, and should be required by Act of Parliament (magistrates particularly) to do so between the hours of eight in the morning and twelve at noon, *without any previous notice whatever*. Other hours should be matters of arrangement. For such solemnisation they should demand the sum of one shilling and one shilling only; and this not as a matter of remuneration, but as a recognition of the fact that a certain work has been done and an act committed.

‘In addition to the above authorised persons, the registrars of births, deaths, and marriages, now appointed by Government, should also have the same power. All marriages must be notified to the registrar at his office within four-and-twenty hours after the event, and a fee of one shilling must be paid for registration. The neglect to make this notification should be punishable. The registrar should be required, by virtue of his office, to insert a notice of the marriage in the next issue of one local paper; and every local paper throughout the kingdom should be compelled to insert such notice for the sum of one shilling: this shilling must be paid by the parties to the registrar. The whole amount of the fees, therefore, should be three shillings, and neither more nor less. The form of announcement in the newspapers to be as follows:

“REGISTRAR’S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

“*June 11.* By R. E. D. Powell, Esq., J.P., at his residence, Emily, daughter of Jas. Farnell, aged nineteen, of Bideford, county Devon,

to John Frampton, aged twenty-two, of Bristol, for three years.

“*June 12.* By S. C. Charles, M.D., F.R.C.S., at his surgery, Eliza, daughter of &c. &c., for seven years.

“Published by authority of

“WILLIAM THOMPSON, *Registrar.*”

‘The ceremony to be performed before the authorised person should be of the simplest and shortest description. Standing before the magistrate, one on either hand, the man should be first sworn upon the Testament, to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, in the usual manner. The woman should likewise be sworn. By these means, all the old checks upon bigamy and illegal contracts will be superseded, since, after this oath, either party would become liable to a prosecution for perjury, if they wrongfully answer the questions then to be put by the magistrate.

‘*Magistrate* (to the man). What is your full and correct name, your parish, your county, and your age?

‘*The Man*. My name is John Frampton, of the parish of St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, in the county of Bristol, and my age is twenty-two.

‘*Magistrate* (to the woman). [The same question and the same answer.]

‘*Magistrate* (to the man). Is this woman related to you in any of the prohibited degrees, or is there any other legal impediment to your marriage? [At the same time handing to him a printed card with the prohibited degrees and legal impediments plainly displayed.]

‘The same question should then be put to the woman, and if their answers are in the negative the magistrate then presiding should say :

‘*Magistrate*. For what period are you mutually desirous of being joined together in marriage?

‘Having received their answers, say for three years—

‘*Magistrate* (to the man). Repeat these words after me : I, John Frampton, am desirous of entering into the state of marriage



with thee, Emily Farnell [placing his hand in the woman's], for the period of three years.

‘Altered so as to suit the feminine gender, the same sentence should be repeated by the woman. The magistrate should then direct the man to take the ring and to repeat after him as follows :

‘I take thee, Emily Farnell, to be my wife for the space of three years ; and I place this ring upon thy finger in token that I accept all the responsibilities which the law of this realm places upon me for so doing.

‘Then the woman shall say after the magistrate :

‘I take thee, John Frampton, to be my husband for the space of three years ; and I permit thee to place the ring upon my finger in token that I also accept all the legal responsibilities of that position.

‘They should then both write their names in a book provided to all magistrates and professional persons for that purpose, and the magistrate afterwards should say, after receiving the shilling fee :

‘As the representative of the Queen’s ma-

jesty upon this occasion, I pronounce ye man and wife for the period of three years.

‘This should conclude the ceremony; and it would then only remain for the magistrate to communicate with the registrar, by tearing off the duplicate form from his book, properly filled up to correspond with the half he retains, and which should pass through the post free as a government document. Of course any magistrate or any person marrying parties either of whom should be drunk or incapacitated from understanding what was going forward should be liable to heavy punishment; and any drunken person demanding marriage should be also liable to a severe penalty; as also persons attempting to occasion the marriage of an incapable or insane individual. The above is the outline of what we consider to be the only rational method of marriage, and as such suited to the requirements of our day. Therefore, so far as lies in our power, we are about to carry these principles into effect. In our case, being the first of the kind, we propose to sign an additional document, making a formal statement of our opinions,

but this is not intended to form a precedent. It should be added to the above, that in the case of persons, at the expiration of three years or any other term for which they have been married, wishing to renew the contract, this should be done by a simple repetition of the ceremony, with the addition of the words “renewal for such and such years” in the sentences repeated by the man and woman, and also in the registrar’s announcement in the newspapers. It would also be desirable that three witnesses should be present—one for the magistrate, another for the man, and a third for the woman—each of whom should sign the certificate of marriage in the magistrate’s book.’

This was the pamphlet they together composed and subsequently published.





## CHAPTER IV.

AT Pierce's own particular desire the marriage was to take place at Bourne Manor. It was of course impossible to hold it in any church; the ceremony, such as it was, must be gone through in a private house. It was hardly the thing to hold it in the bride's own residence at Knoylelands, and they did not care to return to London. There was no desire to shun the publicity that must ensue, but they did not wish a crowd of lookers-on; the actual fact must be accomplished as quietly as possible, whatever noise might ultimately follow. When the day drew near, Philip, the clergyman, left them entirely, and came no longer to the place. He shunned it as accursed, and would not run the remotest risk of having it said that he sanctioned the unholy alliance by his presence. There was some relief in his absence. However convinced

they might feel in their own minds that they were doing no wrong, but rather inaugurating a desirable state of things, yet it was not pleasant to have a man perpetually at your elbow labouring to upset your views. Besides which there was a certain amount of traditionary respect, a halo of indefinite reverence, surrounding the representative of the Church, and this caused just the faintest sense of guilt, as if they were engaged in desecration. So that they were cordially glad that he kept at a distance.

Heloise could not refrain from reflection on the coming event. Till now, whatever had been her passive guilt in loving Noel, she had at least not taken so decided a moral step as to desire separation from Louis. But this three years' system, this marriage for a limited period, could not fail to arouse reflection. It reacted upon her. She could not help wishing that her marriage with Louis had been contracted on similar principles, so that she might, after a little waiting, be free again. There was nothing in this unnatural, and it is difficult to blame her, yet it was the

first decided step she took on the downward road. It was the beginning of the eager desire which soon after rose in her mind to be completely and for ever separated from all bonds and connection with Louis, who, whatever he might be, was still her wedded husband, whom she had sworn to adhere to till death. Such a desire could not fail to let in other thoughts as actively mischievous as this was passive. Those who with Philip will look upon this social marriage of Neville's with horror may trace in this its effect upon Heloise a confirmation of their dislike. From this feeling Heloise grew to be excitedly anxious about the success of the design. How supine and indifferent she had hitherto been we have seen. Now she became deeply interested, and spent her time entirely with Georgie, giving those delicate little attentions which none but a woman, and that woman a loving admiring friend, could give. Out of this evident interest grew up another effect upon Georgie, who, thus strengthened and supported, eased the tension of her mind, and prepared for the event as if it was of ordinary



importance only. Noel held no share in the deliberations of those preliminary days. In his heart of hearts he rather despised this *dilettante* method of procedure. If his brother and his lady really believed and felt what they alleged, why could not they quietly go off arm-in-arm, take the first train, and say no more about it?

If a man really loved, he would not care for marriage on lease, with option of renewal. He would wish to possess the object of his affection for ever, and through all the phases which existence may possibly assume after death. He would not hesitate, nor she either, to consider whether they were legally independent, or to take into consideration cobwebs of moral rights and wrongs. Such ideas never occurred to him with regard to Heloise. But he gave not the slightest sign of these his real sentiments. The greater the fuss and the more it was necessary for Neville to be at Bourne Manor, the better it was for Noel. It gave him almost daily chances of seeing Heloise. Literally seeing, for it was rarely that he got an opportunity to exchange a word

with her. She avoided him, not openly, but with all the tact of her nature. She rejoiced to *feel* that he was in the house with her—that he was near—and yet hid herself with her love from his view. The pretext of constant attendance on Georgie afforded her ample means of concealing herself. These two were now constantly together. Georgie, with all her strong nature, her rather masculine mind and firmness, clung to the fragile creature now much as Heloise had clung to her in the commencement of their friendship. Love Neville as she might, and know him and his disposition ever so well, still there was an uncertainty in the prospect of continual life with him. Even to those who are about to enter matrimony on the old and approved terms, with the sympathy of every one or at least the disapproval of none, there is to the sensitive girl or more thoughtful woman a degree of hesitation and uncertainty ; and we know that the mind fears the unknown dangers far more than those which are familiar.

Georgie had none of the moral support obtained from ancient usage and the strong feel-

ings of society; she was not only about to enter an entirely new social relation, but she was flinging herself boldly in the very face of the world, possibly to be reviled and spit at; at anyrate to be the object of criticism. Naturally, therefore, she clung to Heloise—to *woman's* society—much as the sailors who accompanied Columbus must have strained their eyes upon those native shores from which they were speeding into the great Unknown. For henceforth how many women would acknowledge her? In their secret hearts they might applaud her, and be glad that she had broken the spell that hung over the sex, confining them to the feudal usages of a bygone time; much as the spells of the magicians in the fairy tale bound the princess in sleep for a hundred years, still clothed, when awakened, in the curious and gorgeous garments long since discontinued. But outwardly would they not sneer and carp and cavil and ‘run her down,’ as the phrase is, to the full extent of their nimble and bitter tongues, holding up their hand in utter failure even to comprehend that extraordinary creature who had

thus— It was too painful a subject, really! Georgie had her misgivings that from the day she marked herself out in this way the doors of society would be shut to her. It was all very well in her enthusiastic moods to declare, as she had done to Neville again and again, that she rose superior to the breath of depreciation and detraction—far above the prejudices of society. And so she did rise above those prejudices. But it was not in human nature, however firmly moulded, to utterly divorce itself from all fellow-feeling and want of sympathy from its kind. Especially is this hard to a woman, taught from her youth up to revere the usages of society as much or more than the precepts of the Church. Georgie, like Heloise, having lost her mother early, had not had all the advantages or disadvantages of this training; but she had had enough to leave an impression on her mind. Heloise was a great comfort to her in these days.

The old house at Avonbourne contained a really fine hall. It had been built when the hall was a part of the daily life of the men and women of those times; when the various

ranks of society there met and took their positions openly. There was the dais or lord's seat—the raised platform upon which the lord of the place, with his chosen friends and equals, sat—at the head of the board overlooking the long range of tables. There was the huge fireplace, high enough for a man to ride under on horseback, almost dark and cavernous enough for him and horse to disappear within. Over this there was a carving of a shield, with the arms of an ancient knight, surrounded with oak-leaves cut in the stone, and beneath it the motto in dog Latin, 'Strike not but to destroy;' meaning that a blow should not be given unless it entirely disabled the opponent. The enemy should never be irritated and roused to greater vigour with feeble hits and weak thrusts, the only effect of which was to fill him with contempt. Wait till renewed strength and golden opportunity combined, then deliver one fatal overwhelming blow, and crush him never to rise again. For fully sixty feet this rare old hall extended, and rather more than twenty in breadth, panelled with black oak. The roof rose on an

arch, as if one stood under the keel of an overturned ship, upheld on huge beams and polished rafters. There was one large window at the western end, where there was a courtyard, but all the length of the hall was only lighted from narrow arrow-slits. The western extremity, overlooking a courtyard, was safe from assaults, but the side wall was an outside wall, hence the narrow windows. This western window, large and mullioned—larger than would otherwise have been required in order to give as much light as possible—was full of stained glass in its lower panes. There was the rose of the Tudors, and the arms of many a knight and abbot. The panes above these were green, and some nearly yellow with age. So that this vast and lofty hall was full of a subdued light, a misty radiance, an intangible cloud, which hovered in the corner, but fled at one's approach and took refuge in the recesses of the roof. The eastern end, where the dais was, rising about two steps above the level of the floor, was thus always in a twilight, not dim enough in any way to obscure the view, but sufficient to soften down



the angles and reduce the colour. The floor had originally been paved with stone, but Pierce had this removed, many slabs being worn into holes, and the damp rising through the joints. He laid down a solid foundation of concrete impervious to damp, and on this a mosaic, a facsimile of the pavement of an ancient chapel he had seen; the lion of the Bigods—or griffin may it be called?—figuring upon each tile. This mosaic was not slippery. It was glazed, but not highly so. It did not shine. Pierce's taste objected to both these things—slipperiness and a shining surface. They might do for an Alhambra, but not for such a hall as this.

Long since the walls of this mighty chamber had been hung with lance and axe, matchlock and pike, shield and sword, with a dusty moth-eaten banner beneath each arrow-slit. There they still hung untouched, frowning upon those who passed, each instinct with its tale of the turbulent old times. Swords were there still, notched at the edge; axes splotted with great brown stains; the chronicles of fierce strugglings—man with man. These very

weapons, and the sense of rude savageness which they called forth, brought out into still greater contrast the picture which hung upon the eastern wall, high over the dais. It was a very large painting, so that the artist could represent his figures of fully actual size, adapted to be hung at a height, and seen from some little distance. The tarnished gilding of the heavy frame spoke of vanished time. It was indeed by an old master—it matters not by whom—a master who has left few evidences of his power, but those enough to bear witness to his transcendent genius. It was a painting of Christ. His was the only human figure in it. Not the dead Christ tenderly lifted down with loving hands from the cruel cross, instinct as it were with death. Not the Christ sitting at the table with the disciples, with John leaning on his bosom hearkening to the mysteries. Nor the injured, the insulted, yet divine Being quitting the Prætorium. This was the Nazarene as He might be met upon the road, passing on foot unnoticed from one village to another; alone, communing with his thoughts. The only accessories were the

palm-tree, and a few ears of wheat indicating a corn-field. Else there was nothing but the dusty sandy track, with the print of his footsteps behind—‘footprints,’ indeed, ‘upon the sands of Time’—nothing but the common road and Him. He was in no agony, no distortion; simply walking slowly, thoughtfully, just as you might have met Him, just as the wayfarers met Him in those wonderful days. But the Divinity shone out and irradiated the very road, throwing upon it a mystic and beautiful light, as the autumn moon would transform the white track to a thing of exquisite beauty. The painter had portrayed Him after the famous Letter of Lentulus, a description which, however the critics may dispute it, the heart at once accepts and the soul ratifies as the only possible human impersonation of Deity. ‘He was a man of lofty stature, of serious and imposing countenance, inspiring love as well as fear in those who beheld Him. His hair was the colour of wine, straight and without lustre as far as the ears, but thence glossy and curly, flowing upon the shoulders and divided down the

centre of the head, after the manner of the Nazarenes. The forehead was smooth and serene, the face without blemish, of a pleasant, slightly ruddy colour. The expression noble and engaging. The nose and mouth of perfect form. The beard abundant and of the same colour as the hair, parted in the middle. The eyes blue and brilliant. He is the most beautiful among the children of men.' Out of this bald and meagre outline the painter had evolved the animation of the original, giving it a life and a lustre beyond all words.

This was no mere mechanical carpenter, a man who sawed wood and yawned over it; this was an immortal, a god, a divine being. The man could not conceal the divinity; the flesh could not hide the immortal majesty. To stand before and gaze upon this picture was to receive an unconscious elevation of the soul; it felt that it had imperfectly, and through a glass darkly, seen the aspect of a heavenly existence, and soared upward, enlarged in thought, 'to regions of a heavenly ancestry.' This was no square, bony-chested, angular, mediæval lay figure. When a man

is full of a grand and noble idea, when his whole soul is filled with a high aspiration, with the inflatus of genius, does not his face shine, his eyes glow, his whole form grow larger? does not his humanity expand?

‘The warrior goddess gives his frame to shine  
With majesty enlarged and air divine.’

How, then, should it be otherwise with Him? How could the divine soul, busy with the thought of a world redeemed, inflated with the genius of God, do otherwise than shine forth and show itself?

Under this picture stood a great carved oaken chest, standing on four legs as the old presses did, and bound with iron clamps. This was the muniment chest of the family. This was the altar before which Georgie had to stand. On it they had placed the antique family Bible open, its brazen clasps undone. The corners of the dais were filled with ferns and a profusion of those beautiful plants with variegated leaves, interspersed with here and there exotic flowers and strange shrubs and aloes from far-off lands, till it seemed a recess in a tropical forest. They had filled

the old hall with chairs and seats, and these were crowded with the immediate friends of the bride and bridegroom, behind whom stood the servants of the house. A lane or aisle was left up the centre, and this was laid down with crimson cloth, as was the whole floor of the dais. On the right of the dais was a low arched doorway leading into the house; this too was hung with crimson curtains. The novelty of the event, and the striking scene, filled the audience with intense interest, and they waited with impatience. Precisely at eleven o'clock, Neville, accompanied by Noel as best man, entered the hall by the arched doorway near the dais, and walking rapidly to the steps that led up to it, stood there awaiting Georgiana. He was dressed in the only costume possible on such occasions, a costume that did not become him. He would have looked better in a velvet jacket and straw hat. Noel's brown face was paler than usual, and occasional twinges of pain passed across his brow. His arm was in a sling; the old shot wound found out the cold weather and the proximity of the Avon.



As he passed through the arched doorway, closely behind Neville, he saw a figure, that of a slender woman, crouching at one side, half hidden by the scarlet curtains. His heart gave a bound, and he half involuntarily whispered, 'Heloise.' She shrank still more into her hiding-place, but an ice-cold hand just touched his for a second and no more. Heloise it was.

With the cloud of her husband's guilt hanging over her, she could not take open part in any of these ceremonies, and she could not even be persuaded to be present. Still there was a natural desire to witness these exceptional proceedings; and with that view she had hidden herself in the archway, where, out of sight herself, she could see all. This was the first time their hands had met in that surreptitious manner. It was partially, at least, involuntarily; it lasted but a second, but it did take place, and in that second another barrier was broken down. Even more than the pain he was suffering, the sense of that trembling touch paled Noel's face as he stood beside his brother. A moment more,

and Pierce came up the aisle, attended by Verney, of the firm of Williamson, Verney, & Co., for Georgiana, and by Tournell, of Tournell, Tournell, & Co., for Neville. Pierce ascended the dais, and took his stand right in front of and close to the muniment chest, facing the body of the hall. The two solicitors ranged themselves one on each side, but somewhat in the rear. Hardly had this arrangement been completed when a general agitation tokened the approach of the bride. With a slow and stately step, her noble and well-poised head held upright, not defiantly, but with a certain sense of self-assertion, Georgie, in all the radiance of her beauty, passed up the whole length of the hall. She was dressed in white satin, trimmed with antique lace, the train trailing far behind her. She did not wear the traditional orange wreath, nor the veil, but she carried a superb bouquet; and above her forehead, in the masses of hair, shone and glittered a magnificent diamond star, by the side of which was one large bell-shaped white flower. Eight bridesmaids followed her: there had been a difficulty in selecting these, so

many pressed forward for the office, on account of the novelty of the whole thing. Neville met her half way, and together they went up on the dais, and stood facing each other, one on either side of Pierce. The bridesmaids ranged themselves, four upon each hand. Then Pierce, without a moment's delay, taking one step forward, swore each of them upon the Testament in the usual manner (he was a magistrate). He showed them a document, and asked if that was their signature, and receiving an answer in the affirmative, deliberately read as follows, in a low but distinct voice, audible at the farthest corner of the hall:

‘We the undersigned, Georgiana Knoyle and Neville Brandon, desire to make this public statement in order that the step we are about to take may not be misunderstood. Primarily our reasons are that man and woman are socially equal; and that they are both therefore entitled to equal liberty of action. By marriage in the ordinary way, the woman abjures her own identity, and the man promises to take upon himself responsibilities

which no human being can ever fulfil, while at the same time both, but particularly the woman, incurs disabilities degrading, and contrary to common sense. We therefore desire in this act to record a solemn protest against the retention of a semi-feudal institution. The formalities we are about to go through are established by no recognised authority, but we prefer to thus publicly proclaim our union out of respect for the esteem of society, and with the view of setting a precedent. Our other reasons are set forth at length in a document which we have composed together. Copies of this paper will be handed to every person in this assembly, and it will afterwards be printed. (Signed.)'

Pierce then took up a small manuscript book, and turning to Neville said, 'What is your full and correct name, your parish, your county, and your age?'

*Neville.* My name is Neville Brandon, of Bramleigh parish, county Surrey; and my age is thirty.

Pierce put the same question to Georgiana.

*Georgiana.* My name is Georgiana Knoyle,

of Knoyle parish, county H——; and my age is twenty-four.

*Pierce* (to *Neville*). Is this woman related to you in any of the prohibited degrees; or is there any other legal impediment to your marriage?

*Neville*. She is not related to me, nor is there any legal impediment.

Georgiana answered the same question.

*Pierce*. For what period are you mutually desirous of being joined together in marriage?

*Neville and Georgiana*. For three years.

*Pierce* (to *Neville*.) Repeat these words after me: I, *Neville Brandon*, am desirous of entering into the state of marriage with thee, *Georgiana Knoyle*, for the period of three years.

*Neville* did so, and *Pierce* taking *Georgiana's* hand placed it in his. Then he loosed her hand, and she repeated the same statement after him, and he put her hand again in *Neville's*.

*Pierce*. Take the ring, and repeat after me: I take thee, *Georgiana Knoyle*, to be my wife for the space of three years, and I place this ring upon thy finger in token that I accept all

the responsibilities which the laws of the realm place upon me for so doing.

Georgiana repeated much the same formula; and then Neville placed the ring upon her finger. Up till now the ceremony had proceeded with such rapidity that the spectators had had no time to reflect. But while placing the ring on her finger there was a pause for a moment. In that pause, the sun shone out. It was only the weak February sun, but it streamed through the narrow arrow-slit, and fell in a long beam of light on Georgiana's splendid golden hair, lighting it up with a glow like a halo round her head, and then passing on, rested upon the dusty sandy roadway in the picture at the feet of the Christ. A murmur of admiration arose; one of those slight movements rather than sounds by which a critical audience testifies its approbation; but it was perhaps rather the artistic effect than anything else that they applauded.

Neville and Georgiana then wrote their names in the fly-leaf of the old family Bible, which in the absence of any authorised registry they had chosen to take its place. Messrs.



Verney and Tournell (the solicitors) and Noel also signed it as witnesses, and Pierce added his own at the foot. He then rapidly turned, and said: 'I pronounce ye man and wife for three years.' This completed the ceremony. Georgiana placed her arm in Neville's, and retraced her steps down the aisle, while at the same moment the strains of the 'Wedding March' of Mendelssohn, that beautiful burst of music, came pealing through the arched doorway from the organ in the library. The spectators rose, as if by instinct, as the pair passed, and watched them till the folding doors were shut, and they had gone out of sight; then they dispersed to prepare for the *déjeuner*. With that we have nothing to do, except to remark that Heloise was not present, and that Noel excused himself, on the plea of his aching arm, and rode away abruptly. When a man is deeply, madly in love, it is not a pleasant sensation to watch another, even if that other is his own brother, tangibly realising his happiness.

In the afternoon, Neville and Georgie departed for the Continent.

That entry in the old family Bible, and their signatures to it, was not the only result of this singular proceeding. Philip the clergyman, who would not be present, no sooner heard that it had actually taken place, than he retired to the vestry-room of his church, and taking out the old register-book (the new ones admit of no such entries), he wrote on one of the vacant pages at the end:

‘*February 17, 187—.* This day was consummated a very freak and imagination of the Evil Principle under the guise of so-called Progress’ (Philip was fond of capital letters), ‘my misguided brother acting as officiator. Neville Brandon and Georgiana Knoyle were united in unholy Matrimony at his house, for Three years, Heaven save the mark, in the presence of two solicitors and a cloud of witnesses. May Heaven grant them grace to see the error of their Ways, and to return, and be joined together by Me in this my Church, as the Rubrics of the Establishment do direct! And to this end will I bend my Prayers till this be happily accomplished. —PHILIP LESTRANGE, *Vicar of Avonbourne.*’



## CHAPTER V.

OF all the secret police that ever oppressed a nation there is none equal to the press for ubiquitousness. The French police are notorious as a power, to whom even the very head of the government must bow, whether that head be Louis XIV., Napoleon III., or Marshal MacMahon. No one knows who the agents of such a police are—they are a species of social Jesuits. The very dearest and nearest friend to whom you have been telling your most hidden concerns may be greedily listening with the view of retailing it afterwards to his chief. But our press is worse than this; it actually beats the police. It acts as a police upon the police—espying out all their faults, their follies, mistakes, and lack of insight. Therefore the police hate the press with a sincerity impossible to exaggerate. And the two classes are so civil to each other too, out-

wardly—always ready to exchange information. The police will never accept a theory from the press; they invariably set to work to disprove the theory started by the press, and just as invariably succeed in proving the very facts they denied with such fatuous complacency. But this press is a terrible police. Its agents are everywhere; they stand behind the throne, and they chat amicably with the peasant in his cottage. The very banker in his private country house, in his most secret study, surrounded with his telegrams in cipher, his enigmatical correspondence, and equally enigmatical books of figures, is conscious that through the very walls, of even the ceiling overhead, a power is watching him, listening to the scraping of his pen. You may call a meeting of your private friends, rigidly excluding the reporters, admitting only by ticket, watching the door yourself; yet the next morning all the proceedings are in print. How is this? It is because everybody writes in this our day—clergy, lawyers, doctors, telegraph clerks, post-office people, literally everybody—and how can you tell which of your private friends

may not conceal under his smiling face and dress-coat a fatal faculty for writing and a strong memory? At Avonbourne, of course, they all knew that the affair would be talked of and alluded to in the newspapers, but they did not dread that much. Most people of any social rank at all see their names and their affairs in the newspapers once a year at least. We live so much in public nowadays. Time was when only great potentates, such as the emperor of this, or the king of that, and ambassador so-and-so, had their private movements recorded. But now Mrs. Brown or Miss Robinson no sooner arrives at the sea-side than their names appear in the local gazettes. Every one gets so accustomed to it that nobody cares much about it, except some of the poor thin-skinned ones, with an overwhelming sense of their own importance. So that they really never gave a thought about the newspapers. But some one must have been at that marriage party with a quick ear and a vigorous memory; for the very next morning the most enterprising of the morning papers had two columns of large print and one of



small type—first, a description of the whole scene, painfully graphic, with all the real names of the persons in any way concerned; next, the text of the formalities of the marriage; and, lastly, the text of that document which Georgie and Neville had drawn up together. In addition to this there was a leading article upon the report—one of those articles for which that paper is famous.

It is the fashion, by the way, to sneer at the *Daily Telegraph*; to point and gibe at the classicisms, at the mixture of the far-fetched analogy with the ready slang of the hour. Considered in the abstract, in the calm retreat of the study, with the window open, and a cool breeze fanning the brow, a scent of clover, and the hum of bees, all this criticism may be well enough. Those who can sit and write thus, surrounded with every pleasure, with plenty of time to pick and choose not only their thoughts but their words, may find it easy enough to spot the ungrammatical expressions—the omission of a diphthong in the Latin quotations, or to sneer at the tawdry sentiment. But put them in the place of the



author of the despised article—let them be driven to minutes in which to compose ; let them have to rapidly scan a rough proof of some report, and then to reflect upon it and to choose those reflections which will not only be most picturesque and amusing, but also best suited to a peculiar class of readers—and where would be these same sneerers and gibbers then? They would write, if they wrote anything at all, the most commonplace and dullest of trash. Without a doubt, it displays an immense genius, a capacity for adaptation, a plastic mind, to be able to compose such articles as these on the spur of the moment. How admirably, too, they are suited to the popular taste—the taste of a half-educated public, that likes to be reminded of its studies or its ‘crams,’ and yet not be obliged to hunt out the translation for itself, but to see it plainly indicated in the context; that likes, too, the well-turned, sharp, epigrammatic periods, and a seasoning of anecdote fresh and unexpected. The poet is born and not made, and so is the writer of a *Daily Telegraph* article. Latterly, this much derided and abused

paper has taken a stand which elevates it far above its wobbling crippled companions. It has moved with the age, and expanded its functions to suit the requirements of the social life of the times. Every one now takes an interest in science and in discovery. Every one reads the addresses of men like Professor Tyndall, and the journeys of men like Livingstone. All take an interest, a deep and abiding interest, in these things; and this interest grows daily with the spread of education. People want to go further than these explorers have gone; they long to hear of the great work being carried on to its logical consequence and conclusion. If Livingstone went very near the source of the Nile, the public feel an anxious desire to go still nearer; if Sherard Osborne or Markham point out a channel by which the North Pole can be reached, the public desire to see some vessel start upon the adventurous voyage. But no one fulfils this legitimate, this even laudable public wish. No millionaire comes to the front and offers his superfluous gold to fit out an Arctic expedition, or to construct a telescope capable of solv-

ing the problems of space, or to build a machine that shall really fly. What on earth do they do with their money? They cannot eat it nor drink it all, nor spend it all on horse-racing and yachting. Why does not some one or other of them come forward and endeavour to satisfy this craving of the public mind, and at the same time cover themselves with honour? Are they all blind and fatuous? does the very fact of the possession of unlimited means close the eyes to the perception of how those means can be utilised and turned to the highest pleasure, besides popularity, and therefore profit? For in our days popularity is another word, an equivalent, for profit, not only to newspapers, but to millionnaires and gentlemen. Years succeed to years, and yet no one comes forward, and says, 'I will satisfy the curiosity and the laudable wishes of the people.' At last the *Daily Telegraph* has stepped boldly into the gap, and nobly intends to devote some portion of its gains to clearing up what human ingenuity can of the obscurities which surround the Past and the Distant. It began by sending the Assyrian student, Mr. Smith, to

the mounds at Koyunyik to search for more leaves of the library of the old world. Now it is busy with an expedition into the centre and heart of Africa to set at rest the vexed question of the Nile source. A glorious triumph it would be indeed to journalism if the attempt should succeed, after failures on every hand—failures by men of talent, of armed forces, of kings, and even of nations,—if at last a newspaper, a despised newspaper, a common penny print, should clear away the mystery. And a triumph not only for journalism, but for all men of intellect, now disgusted and tired with the old trammels of routine. If the tone of newspaper writing is coarse, in bad taste, vulgar—if it be so, whose fault is it? Not of the writers, most decidedly, for there are those among them educated to the highest pitch, and possessing every refinement; but the fault of those for whom they write, to whose mental condition the articles must be adapted, just in the same way as they try to teach children to read through pictures in the primers.

None of them at Avonbourne had anticipated this fame. It came on them with a rush,

and took away their breath—this report, and leader in addition. It stunned them for a few moments; then they began to awake to the criticisms and the remarks which must ensue throughout the length and breadth of the land. This report, this leader, had that morning been laid upon a hundred thousand breakfast-tables at least. As it was so important to them, they naturally imagined it would be so to others; and they fancied the bold type staring everybody in the face, unmistakable, not to be escaped from. What is there so light as conversation? The gossamer, the thistle-down, the tiniest insect floating in the air, is heavy, cumbrous, compared with it. It flies swift as the telegraph; it penetrates walls and roofs, this mystic and invisible thing. You cannot hide yourself from it—you cannot escape it. You may go away, and leave no address, so that your letters may not reach you; you may sit in solitude on the beach or in the forest. Let it be where it may, the murmur will reach you; it will force itself upon you. It may be only the waiter, who drops a word in sheer wish to be civil and informing. It may be a remark

casually made by one to another in a crowd, not meant to be heard farther. But this conversation is irresistible—you must hear it. You may just as well go and sit by the roadside at once, and have it over. They heard enough of it at Avonbourne. There was a buzzing in the air, a hum overhead, like the sound of the ‘midsummer hum,’ the noise of myriads of invisible creatures mingling in an endless dance.

The mammas and papas were especially bitter upon this horrid innovation. ‘So highly improper; so immoral; how *could* any woman, any *lady*, do such a thing? Dear me, dear me!’

They had a sufficiently good reason for disliking it. If the daughters only married for three years, how many of them would come back? A man would never get entirely rid of his olive-branches. They would be perpetually returning like the traditional bad halfpenny. The mammas had had too much experience of their daughters, too familiar acquaintance with their pets and tempers, their secret faults, not to know full well that



barely a tenth of the lot could be relied upon to remain. They dreaded the possibility of such an innovation as limited matrimony coming into fashion ; therefore they turned the vials of their wrath and venom upon it, and called in the *odium theologicum* to demolish its merest chance of success. It was so immoral, so unscriptural. Dreadful, shocking, horrid ! An awful Woman ! They did not so much wonder at the Man, though he must be a Wretch ! The clergy, one and all, agreed in carrying on this cry of immorality and unscripturality. They raged and foamed against it. They boiled over it. They got up indignation everywhere. They, too, had a very good reason for all this ; they had vested interests to consider. So on this point they all agreed ; Ritualist, Broad, Low, High, Nonconformist, Methodist, Itinerant, the whole jing-bang, as the Americans say, never ceased their cuckoo cry, ‘ Immoral, unscriptural ! ’

The philosophers looked at it in another light. They referred you to Sir John Lubbock’s book ; and advised you to read about the conditions of social relationship among the

savages, as illustrating the primeval state of affairs. In this most primeval state, the sexes only dwelt together so long as fancy suggested.

Now, said the philosophers, see how the outcome of the highest civilisation bears the strongest analogy to the proceedings of the darkest savagery! Hence, behold the source where civilisation should go for its lessons and its inspirations. It should study primeval man, and then apply all the modern arts and discoveries to carry out these original instincts to their grandest development.

The lawyers, like the clergy, were unanimous in condemnation. They had a sharp discussion as to whether or no Pierce, as a magistrate, and sworn to uphold the laws of his country, was not liable to a prosecution, or at least to be struck off the list of magistrates, for this daring step. They ridiculed the whole idea as wild and impracticable to the absurdest extent. They pointed out what injurious effects it would have upon the rights of property. They likewise had very good reasons for their excitement. The new process was

so simple and so natural that it quite dispensed with the necessity of employing legal gentlemen. People could manage their own affairs, a most undesirable state of things. But the bitterest critics of all were those very persons upon whose sympathy and cordial approval Georgiana counted, the women, namely, who called themselves advocates of woman's rights, and went about the country spouting and lecturing on the same. They ran her down as having spoilt the cause in her overzeal; in good truth they were jealous and envious, not only of the strong will which, in one single step, had done more than all the lot of them together in twenty years, but jealous and envious too of the *notoriety* she had thereby gained. She stood out in a strong light, and they were reduced to shadows. This they could not bear; for these so-called strong-minded women were the weakest and feeblest of their sex, mean, envious, paltry to the last degree.

Georgie's own private friends in London were, after all, the most lenient. First of all

they heartily laughed at her, and revelled in the enjoyment of a new sensation. Then they felt an accession of vanity—always a pleasurable sense—how infinitely superior they were to this eccentric individual. Lastly, they took to pitying her, and it became the fashion in this select circle to bitterly resent the newspaper attacks upon poor Georgie. They resolved, since all the world ran her down, to patronise her, and make much of her, when she returned to London. She should go with them everywhere. In point of fact, they were anxious to appear different from any one else—*distingué*. To do them justice, there were one or two who really did take an interest in this novel social experiment.

After a while they began to long for the return of this new lion, that they might pat it and pet it, and especially that other people might see them patting and petting. But Georgie had at least one class of enthusiastic champions. All the young men in the country, without exception, were hers to a man. They lauded her to the skies. And the young

ladies? Well, they tossed their heads and never read of such things, not they; and all you could get out of them was a simper, and ‘ Really now—now really !’





## CHAPTER VI.

How refreshing it is to pick up Froissart or even Machiavelli's *Florence*. Everybody had something to do in those days, and if they did not always enjoy doing it, they experienced, at all events, a great deal of genuine emotion. This is just exactly what we never get now. It is all so languid and smooth and soft, so delicate and refined, it all passes over like gossamers, tickling a little but leaving no impression. What ever we shall do with ourselves in another half a century no one can surmise. Possibly every one will be dead of *ennui* before then. But in the old Anglo-Norman days, when the very proprietors of the land had to maintain their possessions by sheer force, and were always on the alert lest the serf should rise, or a powerful neighbour invade,—in those days of warfare and rapine they had something to do. It was a wicked



and cruel time; a time which no one can ever wish to return. But the perpetual fighting, the ceaseless clash of steel, the restlessness of the day, left no space for *ennui*; they were all busy, hard at work threshing men as the rustic threshes corn with his flail.

Later down, too, in the age of the subtle politician, in the age of Machiavelli and Cæsar Borgia, what a glittering show it is, and a glittering show with this difference from modern pageants, that it is alive! Behind the banners and the processions; behind the marching soldiers and the dancing mountebanks; behind the very music, the gay scarfs, and the incessant laughter, there is a life, a *verve*, a reality. These men *felt* as well as acted. In our day they act alone. It is a wonderful history, this tale of the Florentine republic, written by the model of all politicians. It is one long web of human ingenuity from beginning to end; a record of men and women striving and struggling against each other for the mastery; and this same eagerness and anxiousness lends a reality to all they did, and excites a corresponding interest

in the chronicle of their times. True it is that in our day we too have something to struggle for—something to do—but it is an incentive which does not touch the deeper, grander chords of human nature. There is Money—the one object and aim of the millions. This is something to do. But it does not bring out the chivalry, the finer feelings; it does not stir the heart and intellect, and waken up all the courage and resolution of the soul, like the trumpet blast of the knights as they charged to the battle. On the contrary, it gradually deadens and dulls all the passions but one, the most despicable of all; it centres the man in himself, and of himself he soon gets tired, and then comes *ennui*. Worse than this, it requires no reality.

Your old knight of steel could not put a dummy in the saddle and send that to the charge. He must be there in person, full of manly vigour and iron determination; shadows and shams were of no avail then. Now all the study and effort is to make a counterfeit presentment pass for true; and it is no very difficult matter, since all the world is

agreed to accept shams, and to require nothing more than that they shall conform to the usages of the hour. If by any chance the sham is a novelty, if it is not in strict conformity, there is a great sputtering; but provided it tallies with the shams that have preceded it and to which we are accustomed, all is well. There is no reality in it. It is all Paper and Credit. But these fellows in Florence were not satisfied with shams; or if they did succumb to such things, it was as the clever guise of a reality really deceived and not affecting to believe.

What, then, has become of all the original energy of man's nature? Has the race which now exists none—has it all vanished? How hard people work at paring down and subduing their own inward vigour, both physical and mental; how singularly hard they labour to reduce themselves to lay figures, passionless, purposeless, mere machines for eating and drinking and sleeping! The slightest evidence of an effort is enough to condemn a man utterly as a rude being, a barbarian, an uncivilised savage. It is fash-

ionable to be languid, delicate, refined; to be undecided and careless, indifferent, *yawnish*. But pare away the natural energy, reduce the original vigour as much as ever they may, still there remains an ineradicable vein of restlessness. So that we see, every now and then, society rush hither and thither in great waves, seeking in some new sensation to find an outlet for the pent-up motion.

What a curious system it is to teach us, not only at school, but at home, and in the early part of our life, ideas and feelings which we must afterwards spend years in endeavouring to unlearn, while we meantime suffer no little deception and misery! Next after the alphabet and the primer, they teach us, or try to teach us, to be 'good.' That is to obey, to believe, to choose the right and eschew the wrong, to be conscientious, to fly to the help of the distressed, to subdue ourselves, and to consider others before us; above all things to be truthful. Even the least impressionable of us cannot help but imbibe a certain amount of faith in these doctrines. Yet those who teach us must know very well

that we shall have to spend years unlearning these lessons by bitter experience. Follow these instructions, and what is the result? Disappointment, loss, deceit, fraud; we become mere carcasses for the vultures to feed upon. As for the right, of what avail is that? The technical invariably overrides equity, till we curse the very day in which we learnt to trust a reed which broke and pierced us. So, too, with another old tradition, the tradition of Work; that work we must, because the ground is cursed, and we must eat bread in the sweat of our brow. That work, moreover, is ennobling and dignifying; that it enlarges man's nature and makes him nearer a god; that there is something grand about it. Also, on more practical grounds, that by work alone money can be made, and position and independence assumed. All these are the merest traditions, the sheerest fallacies. Society has found out long ago that it is by no means a matter of necessity to work in order to eat bread; for do not thousands who never lift their hands to their mouths revel in wine and sweetmeats, in purple and fine linen? As to



work being ennobling and dignified, look at the drunken mechanics and labourers. But taking this as a piece of special pleading, look at the case of a man who really does work as a man should, is it not a very sorry sight to see the intellect so busy over a trifle? That money can be made by work alone is a downright lie, and nothing less. Astute society has learnt long ago that in ninety-nine times out of the hundred, money is made by a combination of circumstances, by luck, by calculation, and most of all by Humbug. Why, then, should we all be brought up in these antique and exploded beliefs—why should we all have to work our way through the experiences and miserable disappointments arising from these fond and delusive hopes? Why not tell us at once the bitter truth, and teach us to meet it in the beginning face to face, and hand to hand—this ‘hard hand-play’ of the old Saxon poet—so that we may be prepared, and lose no time in following the *ignis fatuus*, and believing it to be the rising sun?

We know so much nowadays. Everything has been done. Everything has been thought.



Every possible emotion has been felt in every imaginary manner. Every combination conceivable of human relationship has been worked out, and the quarry is empty. The world has grown so small. Time was (it was a long time ago) when there was a Verge, an Edge, beyond which there was an unknown something for man to seek. All the continents are found now; the geographers assure us that no more remains to be discovered. Excepting only a few small spots, and these, too, narrowing daily, the whole surface of the earth has been surveyed and mapped out and reduced to scale. So, too, it is with social life. It is growing narrower hour by hour, simply from sheer exhaustion. There is nothing to do. All the emotions and pleasures have been surveyed and mapped out and reduced to scale. We know to a hair's breadth how much we ought to cry, and how much to laugh, on every occasion; nothing can possibly take us by surprise and shock us into originality. We are a great deal worse off than the Athenians, who stood gossiping and crying for 'something new;' for we do not

believe in the probability of anything new ever turning up, and if it did it would make us yawn as rather a bore. We got so refined and delicate at one time, that some one started the idea of refreshment by means of mingling with the rude and uneducated.

So everybody became a district-visitor, and climbed up dirty staircases, and looked at crippled people, and smelt horrid smells. Then came the Red Cross mania—everybody became a nurse. But it was of no avail. Simplicity itself was nothing new; and a horrible bore too. Was it not of Budha or some Oriental deity that they fable has to pass through every phase of existence, from the humblest insect up to man, and from man up to the angels, and in each existence to go through all the emotions and combinations possible to it, till finally, having completed the whole round of life, he became merged in the Deity? In our time society has nearly done all this; but there is no sign of the approaching apotheosis. It grows sandier, duller, dustier, more desert-like, year by year. As Heine said, translated by a true poet,

whose name does not remain in memory at this moment, the world has got so dusty—

‘ So rotten, crooked, cold, and small,  
That were there not a bit of loving,  
There’d be no living here at all.’

Since then, however, all the ‘loving’ is exhausted. The highest and most ethereal of all the passions has been fathomed, surveyed, mapped, and reduced to scale. The theodolite of analysis has levelled it to commonplace. We do not travel on foot now. We step on a moving platform, and *wait* till we reach our destination. We do not love now; it is all done for us,—in books. By the bye there is, speaking of walking, something horrible in boots. Have you ever been to a public meeting, and sat rather towards the front, near to the platform, so as to be able to see under the long table they generally place on it, and behind which the platform people sit? Just after listening to some wonderful peroration, full of sentiments and aspirations which you, a student, know full well to be as old as the hills, and to have filtered down into their present form from the

time of Plato—just then you drop your gaze, and it rests upon the row of boots under this platform table. Boots of all descriptions—shining boots, dull boots, dusty boots; big, little, medium, square-toed, narrow, broad, splodgy, all sorts—but *boots*. Socrates and Plato, Leonidas and Cæsar—all the heroes—the gods too, walked with naked feet, or in sandals. They knew nothing of Day & Martin, of ugly squat earthenware bottles, of a thick odoriferous liquid, of brushes, nor of scrapers. Their feet were open, free, unrestrained. Look at the feet of the statues, how beautiful they are. But the feet in those boots—‘cabined, cribbed, confined,’ distorted. Somehow there is something about these boots at which my mind revolts. No man can be a god in boots. They are the very symbols of our dirty macadamised times. Our very souls are getting macadamised, laid down, levelled, and metalled, so that we may run in grooves for ever—smoothly, without the slightest fear of seeing anything fresh. Everything is labelled now; you can find it all in books of reference. What with dictionaries, gazet-

teers, concordances, indexes, guides, and so forth, the universe can easily be packed in a moderately-sized bookcase. Why study—why learn botany, or geology, or physiology, or any other science—why exercise your mind or memory? All the memory requisite is to recollect the letters of the alphabet under which the subject can be classed, and then turn to the innumerable encyclopædias. Original research is labour lost, especially as after it is found there is nothing new in it.

The men can swear, and drink, and play billiards, and back horses, and ruin themselves, and generally go to the devil; very tame and used-up amusements, it is true, but still something to do. But the poor ladies—what on earth *are* they to do in the years to come? With flirting a science—dressing a mere mechanical imitation—parties, balls, visits, simply matters of monotonous business—what *are* they to do? Even illness is no excuse to avoid *ennui*; for all the Spas are exhausted, and all the seaside resorts explored. The limits of human ingenuity appear to be reached, and we cannot as yet add a new

hemisphere to the brain, and so discover novel combinations. The flattest and tamest of all are the 'spirits' who promised so much at first, and turned out to be as dull as the most *ennui*-eaten mortal.

All of us go tramping round and round like a horse turning a mill, each following in the other's footsteps; and even in this there is a little relief, for it saves us the trouble of attempting to discover a new path only to be disappointed. There never was a time when invention and discovery were at such a premium. Witness a new colour, for instance, or rather a new shade, for the possible colours were all in the dusthole long, long ago. When gas tar was found to be so prolific a source of new tints, what a rage there was for them! Everybody wore magenta within a month of its discovery; even the fearfully odious eau de Nil took amazingly for a while. But the elder and more experienced are not satisfied even with this. They have seen so many new inventions, the charm has gone by; it is impossible to feel once more the charm of novelty. The worst of it is that we are



all growing so old now. Nobody is young any longer ; at least, no one is youthful. It is the greatest crime we can commit. But, alas ! the youngest know such a lot, that there is little fear, if any, of them falling into that sin.

At this moment two young creatures—one of each sex—are engaged in working out this very problem, to their own satisfaction at all events ; their wandering planets are rapidly drifting across our orbit.

The problem is a new life. These two were unconscious of what they were doing, but they were working it out. As Georgiana and Neville faded away in the west, these arose in their turn in the east. But as yet and for some time there is but a faint glimmer of them, or rather of one of them.





## CHAPTER VII.

THERE was no society in Venice, so they moved to Vienna. Their idea was not to conceal themselves; in point of fact, their primary wish was to be the observed of all observers. And they had their desire to the full.

It was one of the gayest winters ever known in the gay Austrian capital, and Carlotta was seen everywhere. She did not restrict herself to the fashionable plainness in dress of tamer London; here she blazed forth in all that gorgeousness of colour which suited her tulip-like beauty. Her dress was magnificent, her extravagance unequalled. This is a sure way of attracting attention.

The nameless Americans who come to Paris, dating from impossible places in the western wildernesses, without a pedigree, without a title, a reputation, or even a

good face, make to themselves circles of admirers, crowds of spectators, simply and solely by the power of the almighty dollar. There is a fascination in watching a gambler at the *rouge-et-noir* table whose stakes are fortunes, who wins ten thousand or loses twice as much in a few minutes—there is a glamour about it. Carlotta obtained all the *éclat* that the most lavish expenditure could arouse. Where did she get the money from? When she received Horton's communication from her solicitor, she had revolved the necessity of taking plenty of cash with her, for she knew full well that without money Louis would soon tire of her. The mean detestable cynic would soon weary of charms for which he had to pay dearly. It was absolutely necessary that she should have money with her. She reckoned up her resources, and found that out of her own annual income—the interest on the 100,000*l.* which she had thought her own—she had not one shilling left. Of the cheques she received from Horton, over and above this, there was about 250*l.* remaining. This was a mere bagatelle. She had her

diamonds and other jewels it is true ; but she, with the instinct of her type, clung to those ornaments almost as closely as to life itself. Dimly and in the far distance she foresaw a time when they might be extremely useful to her. They must not be sold or pawned ; she must find some other way of raising money.

At last it occurred to her that as yet no one but Williamson, Verney, & Co., the solicitors, were aware of her rupture with Horton. To the world she was still the wife of the famous millionaire, almost certain to succeed to his countless wealth. There still remained Horton's reputation for wealth to trade on. Carlotta in her most off-hand and indifferent way wrote a note to one of those bill-discounting firms with whom she knew Horton had large dealings. The head of the house waited upon her obsequiously within half an hour of receiving it. With an air of contemptuous scorn for the mere commoner, she handed him a slip of paper on which was inscribed a list of her debts, and with a few words explained to him that she had inadvertently exceeded her allowance, and did not desire

(this she hinted) to ask her husband for more at that moment. Horton, she mentioned casually, allowed her 50,000*l.* per annum. These debts were only 25,000*l.* ; she could pay them in three months, but could not be annoyed with people pestering. The bill-discounter, eager to get the wife of the millionaire into his hands, certain in his own mind that Horton would pay anything rather than have an action brought against his countess, saw a chance of making a superb coup, and fell into her trap in a moment. On her note-of-hand alone he advanced her 25,000*l.*, Carlotta not even troubling with imperial disdain to ask what interest he charged. The bill-discounter inserted 25 per cent in the note, and believed he saw his way to 40.

Within an hour after his departure Carlotta had cashed his cheque, and filled one compartment of her dressing-case with two hundred and fifty 100*l.* Bank of England notes. A week afterwards she was in Vienna with Louis. The Austrian banker with whom she deposited her money bowed to the ground in very humiliation of amazement as Carlotta

tossed him the piles of notes, as much as to say, 'This is nothing.' It is wonderful what a respect they have abroad for a Bank-of-England note. They have as superstitious a veneration for the oblong bit of paper as they have for the Host itself. Its effect is magical, far superior to solid gold. Imagine, then, the stupefaction of the man to whom a lady brought two hundred and fifty all at once, and all for a large amount. The story flew over the city in two hours ; it crept into the papers. Carlotta was marked out in a moment.

These dear Viennese are not so straitlaced as we are in England. With the report of her wealth there soon also flew about the equally interesting report of her elopement and of her rank. Instead of everybody turning up their noses, the effect was precisely the reverse. They look upon these matters in a romantic way abroad ; or if they think upon them seriously at all, it is philosophically, as students engaged in dissecting a new phase of human life. They crowded round her ; they fêted her ; they invited her to their houses, and gave her grand receptions.



An archduke, one very near the throne, let it be understood that he was her devoted slave. Her beauty became the talk of the city. In all this they left Louis quite out of sight. Nobody ever thought of him. He was but the accessory—the canvas on which this great artist worked, merely the horse which bore her burden; quite out of the question—a shadow; a sort of chaperon, nothing more. Carlotta rose daily on the breath of popular ardour. She wore her diamonds—an archduchess saw them, and envied them.

The archduchess had many friends—a strong and impregnable position; but she had also many enemies. She imprudently attacked Carlotta. Carlotta sneered, and attacked her in turn. It became war to the knife between them; yet neither had ever spoken a word to the other. A faction formed round each. After a while these factions took a political aspect. The archduchess became the centre of a purely Austrian circle; Carlotta as a foreigner, and from England, naturally attracted the Hungarian section. So

they ranged themselves one against the other. It so happened that just at this time there were great battles in the political arena. The Hungarians were pressing hard to obtain the recognition of their independence. Eager to gain their point, the great chiefs of the party made use of Carlotta. On the Continent women—always beautiful women—have played an important part in the rise and fall of nations; a part prosaic England can never comprehend. These chiefs recognised in Carlotta a genius to their heart's delight. She was the very agent they wanted. Deak himself waited upon her. The archduchess, dying with envy and jealousy, had recourse to her family, who were very powerful; and they moved the throne for an order to invite her to depart. But at that moment the Austrian Government was in a critical condition. The Bohemians, the Hungarians, the Czechs, the Slavs, were all in a ferment; Roumania was in an unpleasant state; all was in dangerous uncertainty. Especially the Hungarian party were domineering; Carlotta was notoriously favoured by them. Then they remembered

that they had heavy loans due to a certain Horton Knoyle, a millionaire. This English lady, report said, was his wife. It was quite true that she had eloped from him ; still one never knew ; she might return to him again. She was a dangerous woman ; she might through him upset the money market. No, it was too dangerous. Carlotta could not be invited to depart.

This defeat of the archduchess became known, and the result was of course a tremendous impulse to Carlotta's importance. The Hungarian party began to have a genuine faith in her. A certain ambassador from a certain State, very anxious of foreign support, called upon her privately, and did his utmost to bring her round to his views. Meantime there was the most incessant succession of operas, balls, parties, Heaven knows what—dissipations of every conceivable kind, and Carlotta the central figure everywhere—Carlotta and her diamonds. She well understood the value of these diamonds.

To add the finishing touch, it came to pass that the Austrian Government, dismayed

at the aspect of affairs, recognised Hungary as an independent State, and granted important privileges. At that ceremony Carlotta was present, not as a visitor and as a spectator, but as a principal actor; and the Emperor himself, not a little curious over this wonderful creature, of whom he had heard so much, paid her some little but marked attention. He dared not go any farther, though he was dying of curiosity to converse with her. He was too closely watched to leave the palace on the sly. Poor, wretched creatures, these emperors, mere stalled beasts, tended with such reverent care. O, yes; but never allowed one moment of real freedom. Carlotta all the while was hard at work while the sun shone. She knew very well she could not depend upon Louis; she watched him constantly, and detected a few slight but unmistakable symptoms. It was all very well while she could keep the balloon in the air; but afterwards? Therefore she made hay while the sun shone; the hay she made was the admiration of men. This is not exactly the precise definition. Men in our day are

much too clever to admire anything. They have seen so much, and been so terribly wicked in their time, that there is no genuine emotion left in them.

But there is a species of fashionable emulation which passes very well for emotion. Carlotta knew her power in exciting this fashionable emulation, and she used it unsparingly. Specially she played on the poor archduke. These archdukes have never been famous for much wisdom since the great Napoleon gave them such a rapping on the head. He woke them out of their slumber; but he hit them too hard—the poor wretches have never recovered it. This particular archduke was softer than most of his kind. He was a good horseman; a splendid figure; he was really handsome in his full military costume. If he could have been set up in a shop-window in Regent-street, dressed in that costume, and slowly turned round, like a leg of mutton before the fire, he would have made the fortune of an outfitter. There it began, and there it ended. There was only one chance for this being—it was the chance of

his getting a handsome wife. He might then have been useful in one way; there might have ensued a perpetuation of handsome people. But they tied him up to an inane, flat-faced German woman—a creature about four feet high, and four feet six in circumference—they who had the pick of all Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia, to say nothing of Italy and the eastern shore of the Adriatic, famous for beautiful women. So that he grew softer and more useless than ever. He had begun to drink, but not furiously yet. Then he saw Carlotta; she intoxicated him quickly. As the man was a booby, and could not understand delicate flirtation—a creature upon whom all the refined machinery of titillation was lost—she allowed him certain familiarities: for instance, he was allowed to mumble her hand; and once she even went so far as to make no objection to his kneeling down and kissing her foot, or rather her boot. He was very far gone indeed, this poor fellow. He really loved her in his way. He wished his wife at the devil. He would have married Carlotta with the greatest pleasure.



He forgot one thing—first, that Carlotta was not exactly marriageable; secondly, that if he was himself eligible, the Austrian Government, with true paternal care, would have packed him off on a voyage round the world, out of arm's way. In Rasselas's time they had no very great difficulty with these shambling princes. They had only to shut them up in a valley and forget all about them. Unfortunately there is no such valley nowadays. Therefore we see in the papers every now and then telegrams from New Zealand and the Cape of Good Hope, Japan and such places, how such and such a prince, or such a royal noodle, with his suite had called there *en route* round the universe.

The voyage *à la* Captain Cook is the Happy Valley of our days. But the archduke being married they let him alone, and he had no difficulty in entangling his heart. Carlotta thought the thing over seriously. He was about the best of the lot—*i.e.* he had most money. It did not take her long to make up her mind. He was evidently the very man for her purpose. It was time too that she

made some decisive step, for the winter season was rapidly drawing to a close, and a certain event grew inconveniently near. She looked round her; the archduke had these to recommend him: first his money, next his rank, thirdly his stupidity. He was sincere enough to really love her. Therefore she loosened the reins a little with which she drove him, and patted him on the back. Thus encouraged he grew bolder, and at last asked her to come with him down to a quiet place of his in Bohemia.

This hardly suited Carlotta just then; so she was virtuously indignant, but not *too* indignant. Archduke grew more and more pressing—offered to leave the country, and all his claims to distinction, to be with her. This hardly suited Carlotta either. At last she consented to put him to the test. She would meet him in Venice quietly in three months' time; if he still loved her, why perhaps—The archduke rapturously kissed her, and then went on his knees to beg pardon, and Carlotta kicked him.

Now it so happened that the very arch-

duchess over whom Carlotta had triumphed in the Hungarian victory was herself unmarried. She had a title, but nothing else in particular. These creatures are apt to turn out white elephants, people are shy of marrying them. This archduke—we will call him Leopold, to save trouble, though that was not his real name—was her cousin; and she had had designs on him, designs of which Leopold was utterly oblivious. She was disappointed at the paternal arrangements made by the Government; but that was after all not his fault. But this Carlotta—this English *lady* (she did not use ‘lady,’ but a very unflattering name)—was quite a different thing. She hated Carlotta as none but women who have had their whole lives subdued and screwed down can hate their more free sisters. She cared so little who saw it, and became so open in her enmity, that Leopold, stupid as he was, noticed it. The lout went straight to her and boxed her ears in the midst of a crowded assembly, just as he used to do when they were children and played together. The archduchess scratched him, and then fainted in sheer spite.

Vienna rang with it. Carlotta was satisfied; she had made a *reputation*. She would retire now for a little while. She took a country house in Styria and left Vienna, taking good care that Leopold should not discover her whereabouts. A little event was about to happen which it was very undesirable he should know anything about. That little event was the birth of a son, but not an heir, to Louis.

And Louis himself?’

And the two hundred and fifty 100*l.* Bank-of-England notes?





## CHAPTER VIII.

LOUIS stood under a chestnut-tree, sheltering himself from the heavy rain, not only with the branches, but by means of an umbrella. This chestnut formed one of a number in a certain famous grove not far from Vienna. He was dressed in the very height of fashion—as exquisitely as if he were going to a ball for the first time with his bride: he seemed scarcely able to stand for fear of soiling his boots, and there was an evident dread lest a drop of rain should spoil the sleek gloss of his coat. He had a pistol in his right hand.

You see Louis had not gone with Carlotta into Styria. When he met Carlotta at Venice by appointment in that cool, off-hand, matter-of-fact, modern style, there was a sense of intense self-complacency. He looked upon her much as an old Roman general might have looked upon the captive of his bow and spear,

reserved to adorn his triumph. His heart swelled with vanity and conceit as he glanced over her with a critical eye.

Yes, she was faultlessly dressed, not a doubt of that. Those who are *à la mode* in London too often let themselves become dowdy and flat so soon as the Continent receives them, or else fly into the other extreme and flare like hollyhocks.

Carlotta was an artist in dress. She could bear it for one thing. She was a species of canvas, which could be painted on as deeply as you liked; you could not lay it on too thick. She could bear it all. What would have sunk other women she carried off with conscious ease. Not a colour she could wear, not a tint she could choose, but heightened the effect of her own singular and striking beauty. But then she had good taste, and never chose anything *outré*. Artists in these things know very well that the real dress lies in the fit and in the trimmings; the material, the groundwork is only of secondary importance. Louis recognised in a moment the fact that he carried with him a woman who could not be concealed;



she would be safe to have a crowd round her. This was just what he wanted. People would envy him, wonder at his fortune, and think what a devilish clever scamp that Fontenoy was. And so the foreigners did—for a time at all events, till they understood the man. Neville Brandon had a curious theory about the moon and the sun, and in short the whole solar system. It was grounded on the doctrine of the conservation of energy or force. The force that carries a bullet along in the air at an enormous speed is not lost when the ball finally reaches the earth; it is only transmitted to something else, and there stored up.

So, said Neville, this great sun of ours has been 'burning, baking, broiling us' for some few trifling millions of years, but it is quite certain that it cannot go on so for ever, and that it has not been going on so all through half eternity. His idea was that, of the heat given out by the sun, the earth and all the planets were gradually absorbing a part, and so growing hotter and hotter, like a ball of iron before a bright fire, while meantime the sun grew cooler and cooler. In the end the sun would

be exhausted, and grow cold and habitable; while at the same time the earth and the planets would become glowing suns, and return to the original sun the heat and light absorbed from it during myriads of centuries.

There was nothing particular to support this idea beyond the prophecy that the earth should become a burning mass; and the fact that the heat had already risen up as near to the surface as half a mile. Neville had no serious faith in this suggestion, still he threw it out. Louis had no knowledge of astronomy, but he had an idea that if the multitude admired and fêted Carlotta till she became a sun, some part at least of the force thus generated would be transmitted to him. While she grew more and more notorious in Vienna, and people admired and crowded about her, Louis smiled with the utmost complacency, and metaphorically patted himself on the back. But after a time—it took a long time to do this, he was so crusted over with conceit—he began to have uneasy feelings that he was left very much in the shade. This canker grew in his mind, and fed upon his life, till he became

ridiculously restless. His first idea was that after all perhaps people did not know who he was, and what relation he bore to Carlotta. Perhaps he did not appear in her company sufficiently; he had left her to herself too much. To remedy this, he accompanied Carlotta everywhere, much to her ill-concealed contempt, but somehow or other he was passed over. Louis sulked, and even growled. With her sweetest smiles Carlotta asked what was the matter. He got up and went out. These were the first symptoms that set Carlotta upon her guard, and made her anxious to secure a friend. Still time went on, and nothing materially changed. Louis lived pretty much as he had always done, and there was no open quarrel. But there was a gap, a tiny crevice between them. He began to grow tired of her—that was the long and short of the matter. It was all very well for a time, while the novelty of mischief was in it. But when he came to have her always at hand, always easily accessible—when the difficulty of meeting, and artifices and concealments, were no longer needed—then there gradually ensued a

flatness, a dull tameness—just the very thing he detested most of all. However, he managed to pass the time away through the winter, gambling a great deal. He fancied himself, as the phrase is, at gambling. In the low saloons of America and Europe he had learned every trick and dodge that the ingenuity of man had contrived with the object of cheating; and some of these were so extremely clever that not even the watchful eyes of the spectators in the Viennese saloons could detect them. For Louis, though in no want of money, did not hesitate to put in practice these cunning little plans, not only out of the pleasure of winning, but because he really revelled in the enjoyment of making hatfuls of money. But at last intoxicated with success he lost his head. He left *écarté*, and such games where human skill is of some avail, and where the very charm of the game consists in the perpetual struggle of the intellect against Chance, and attempted to carry the roulette-table. Here there was no opportunity to cheat—at least not on the players' side—it was all blind chance, and he was as much in the dark as any one. But possessed

with the true gaming mania he went eagerly to work to stump the proprietors of the table, utterly regardless of the repeated losses he sustained. His theory was that the sitting gamester sweeps the board, a maxim which soon bid fair to ruin him, as it has ruined scores of others. Fellows lose a note or two, and then double, till it makes a good sum, and then say, 'O, we can't retreat; we will go on, in time our luck must change.' So they keep on till all is lost. The only way to win is to rise and leave the game the moment one begins to lose—an apparent paradox. Put it in practice if ever you take to play, and don't be sneered or laughed out of it, nor even bullied.

Louis kept on till he lost the whole of the money he had previously won, and made serious inroads in the sum he had brought with him. Excited as he was, however, he had quite sufficient steadiness of mind left not to ruin himself. He did at last leave off and look round him. He reckoned up his finances; he had two or three hundred left, a mere nothing. But he must curtail his expenses. Carlotta was an expensive article.

The mean wretch left out of sight the fact that he had not spent a pound upon her. She knew better than to come to him for money. Louis, however, was now in a reflective mind; and he began to think over many things. What had he gained by this wild freak, as he called it to himself? They did not make much of him in Vienna—quite the other way. He was tired of Carlotta's style of beauty, he wanted a change. He had anticipated much envy and much congratulation from the English acquaintances whom he met in the saloons. But no such thing. They rather shunned him. They did not refuse to acknowledge his presence; but they sidled away as soon as possible, and left him to himself. Not a word was said about his glorious exploit. There was a dead silence on that. The fact was it fell flat. They did not like it—it revolted them. They were a free-and-easy lot, none too strict in their morals. If he had run away with any other woman but his own wife's sister they would have laughed and joked, and crowded round him, and swore it was the best lark out. But this form of dissipation disgusted them. It was



out of their code; it was a cold-blooded piece of wickedness, for which they had no taste. They avoided him, though they sought Carlotta. This stung Louis to the quick. As a matter of course, instead of casting the blame where it was justly due—*i.e.* on himself—he threw it all on Carlotta. She had led him into it—he actually grew virtuously indignant with her—*he!* Not that he ever said a word to her, but he sulked and avoided her. Latterly a new subject had occupied his mind—this money. He had learnt by his correspondence in England that Carlotta had no 100,000*l.* to fall back upon. Horton's solicitors had let that fact be known; it soon got into the clubs; from the clubs it reached Louis. He did not know how much money she had brought with her, nor how much her diamonds were worth; but this he was certain of, that let her plunder be ever so great it would not last long at the rate she had been going. To compete with archduchesses and head a faction in the State is no light matter. He marked her expenditure—noted it for six weeks in his quiet sardonic way. What was she to do when all her

money was gone? *He* should not keep her, that was certain. Altogether Louis made up his mind to be rid of her at the first favourable opportunity. So when Carlotta went into Styria on pretence of her health (trying above all things to hide from him the real cause, which she knew would set him against her more than anything else), he shrugged his shoulders and said he should remain in Vienna. Very well, said Carlotta; so they parted somewhere about the latter end of January, after about nine weeks of each other's company. When she had gone, Louis felt rather dull for a while. Though he had ceased to care for her, yet she had been something to occupy his mind. He felt the want of it. He did not care to return to England yet. He was thoroughly disgusted with all Carlotta's fine schemes of getting him divorced from Heloise. No step whatever had been taken in that matter, nor ever would be, said Louis to himself, with one of his hateful sneers. 'She may hate me, and rail at me, but a woman thinks twice before she gives up a man. How eager they all are to marry!' He

had very little money, that was another reason why he did not care to go back yet; life would be intolerable in London without plenty of cash. Here he could dawdle about at all events; so he dawdled about. Dawdling about with Louis meant penetrating into all the odd corners—all the dustholes of humanity. He ferreted his way through the burrows that the thieves and vagabonds had bored for themselves underneath the fair structures of the rare old Austrian capital. Some of these he had been in before. Others were new to him. Meantime an Avenger was on his track.

When Carlotta's note reached him, Victor was stupefied. He could not believe his eyesight, still less comprehend that all this was true, and not some trick played off upon him. He rushed to her house; she was out. This struck a chill into him. He rambled about near her mansion all day—he was too restless to go in and wait—calling at intervals, but always meeting with the same answer—‘My lady is out.’ She was out all next day, and the next, and the next. A growing convic-

tion sprang up in his mind that the note was literally true, and that she had really gone. Then he saw the paragraph in the papers announcing the flight of Carlotta with Louis. He raged, and boiled with hatred, jealousy, and excitement. Yet even then he did not blame or doubt *her*. It was all Louis's doings. He read his note again, and the sense dawned on him that he was disinherited—cast off—reduced to a poor paltry three hundred a year; he who had always looked upon himself as the heir of millions, and had planned out his life accordingly. Who could have betrayed him? Without a doubt it was Louis. His love for Carlotta actually increased now that she had covered herself with infamy. Till then there had been a certain amount of reluctance, a secret sense of guiltiness even in his wildest moods. Now that was gone; she had flung herself open, made herself fair game, and he, the hunter, threw himself with added ardour into the chase. To Venice, eh—she had gone to Venice? To Venice went Victor. He searched high and low, but found no Carlotta. He made inquiries by the aid

of the police, and ascertained one fact at last—that no such person existed in that city. Where then could she have gone? Paris was his first idea; but he reflected that Horton was there. Then Florence, Rome, Brussels, Berlin, and so on. He had no reason to suppose that she was in either of these places; still he would make sure. He determined to search them all. He began with Florence; then Rome and Naples, so to Sicily, and then back again to Switzerland. This took up eight or nine weeks. Finally, on his way to Berlin, he called at Vienna. By this time he began to feel what it was to be ‘reduced to the ranks.’ His money ran short; he had barely ten pounds left. Thus it was that he could not prosecute his inquiries in the royal way he had hitherto done. All he could do was to post himself in the frequented places and watch. This he did, and once Carlotta passed within a few feet of him, and he saw her not; for the simple reason that he did not look for her in that guise. She was rolling along in a grand equipage with a lady whom he had previously heard was the wife of an ambassa-

dor. Victor never dreamt of Carlotta's going out openly into the world. He felt sure she was living in retirement. So he passed over the ambassador's carriage without a glance. 'The eyes see what they come to see,' as the old maxim goes; and he had not come prepared to see her in this position. For a whole fortnight he watched and waited—in vain; Carlotta had departed for Styria at the end of the first week. His money was now fast disappearing, though he half starved himself and slept 'rough' till he had a wild and haggard appearance, still his clothes were those of a gentleman. He had reached his two last napoleons when he saw Louis. Wild with rage, he rushed after him, followed him up the steps of a clubhouse, pushed past the waiter, overtook Louis in the midst of a saloon crowded with gentlemen, and first tapped him on the shoulder till he turned round, and then felled him to the ground with one blow. If he had taken his time, and been cool, he would have aimed at the face; but he struck out wildly, blindly, and hit Louis on the breast. The force of it threw him off his balance; but



he was not hurt or stunned. He sprang up instantly, but before Victor could renew his assault the gentlemen present had crowded round and interfered. Victor was too furious to explain himself; the one word his parched lips could articulate was 'Carlotta!'

At this Louis faintly sneered, and some of those present looked at each other. It was plainly a case for a duel.

Victor hearing that fatal word snapped at it, 'Yes, yes, there must be a duel.'

Louis turned pale, and looked from one side to another to see if there was no way of escape. Then he began to cast doubts upon Victor's position, a mere nameless vagrant. But this the spectators would by no means allow. Victor was well dressed, and he had the unmistakable air of a gentleman.

'Very well,' said Louis, with affected composure, 'let it be at once, then—this hour.'

'This hour!' cried the aggressor.

Louis asked for a second. At this there was an awkward pause. They did not like him. At last a Russian gentleman stepped forward. Victor had to choose between

several, for they pressed their services on him. They knew nothing of the cause of the quarrel, but the popular feeling was against Louis. He had already bitterly repented his affected indifference. The cabriolets were at the door; only two could be got, and as it was raining hard, no one cared to go on foot or horseback, especially as the evening was closing in, and there was every evidence of a stormy night. Victor insisted upon walking to the scene of action beside the cabriolet in which his second rode. The second remonstrated with him—told him the jar of walking would unsettle his nerves. Victor was in a burning heat and fever, and he would not get out of the cooling rain. Thus he reached the chestnut grove perfectly saturated.

Louis, meantime, had reflected. He recovered himself a little. From so mad a fellow as this little danger need be apprehended. All he had to do was to aggravate Victor and make him lose his head; he would be sure to miss. Louis, like a true coward, had made pistol-shooting a study; he thought it made him safe, and he really was a splendid

shot in a gallery. But this was a different matter. Still he recalled to his memory, as he drove along, the feats he had performed, the fingers he had shot off gloves, and the aces he had spotted on cards. He arranged his tie, ran his fingers through his hair, curled his moustache, and tried to gain courage by cultivating his natural conceit. He wanted to appear diabolically cool, and thus to shake Victor's nerves. When they arrived, he cried out that it would be much more pleasant to sit in the dry and be shot; suppose they drew up the cabriolets ten paces distant, flung open the doors, and fired at each other thus? Victor, who wanted to kill his man, utterly refused. Louis had to get out; but he secured an umbrella, and insisted upon being allowed to hold that over his head at all events. So the dandy duellist stepped daintily down and picked his way across under a chestnut tree, and then posed himself, declaring that he really could not stand anywhere else. Victor's second strongly objected to Louis holding an umbrella; but Louis would not give it up, and Victor did not care a button. This point

granted, Louis's hopes rose a little, for the lower part of the handle of this umbrella was made of metal, and so was the curve of the handle, and he calculated he should be able to so place it as to possibly intercept a ball speeding on its way to his heart, for he fired from his hip and not with outstretched arm. Victor, on whom all these minutiae had been totally lost, waited in a species of stupor to receive his pistol. At that moment his thoughts were far, far away. Through the drenching rain, through the thick grove, he saw a form of beauty, a shape which had stolen his heart. He was full of Carlotta, dreaming of that fatal woman, when they placed the pistol in his hand.

So the nephew of the fallen wife stood opposite the seducer, armed with deadly weapon, waiting the word to kill. 'Fire!'

As Victor's second had anticipated, the umbrella disturbed his principal's aim. Unconsciously it attracted his sight. His ball was too high—it drilled a hole through the silk umbrella. Louis's first shot missed entirely.

'Aim low,' whispered the second, as he

placed another pistol in his hand—‘aim at his legs.’

Victor did so, and a wild fierce pleasure rose in his head as he glanced along the barrel; this time he felt sure. His ears strained themselves to catch the first letter of the signal word. It came—he pulled the trigger.

Louis, with a violent effort, had regained still more his equanimity; he wound himself up to the highest pitch, and resolved to wait till Victor had fired, and then take a steady aim.

Victor pulled the trigger; there was a snap as the hammer struck the cap, but no explosion; one drop of rain had damped the ill-made foreign cap. Louis’s nerves, strung to the highest pitch, heard that sharp click, and in a moment divined that the pistol had missed fire; and in that same moment, too, so inconceivably rapid is the glance of thought, he foresaw that if he did not fire at once he should have to wait in suspense and dread till the pistol was reloaded. His finger pressed the trigger almost simultaneously with the click of Victor’s hammer, and while the seconds were in the very act to rush forward.

There was a spurt of flame hissing through the rain, a little heavy smoke, and a form fell with a thud upon the earth and dashed up the mud and the water. They ran to him—all who were there. But they did not touch him. A horror fell upon them. There was a round red spot in his forehead. He was dead. The ball had gone straight to the brain.

As if with one consent they made for the cabriolets, and hurried off. As they neared Vienna Louis began to grow conceited with his skill, and asked if he had not made a good shot. There was no reply—it grated upon them.

On the eve of the very day that Georgiana and Neville Brandon were married (after their own fashion) a still and silent form lay upon its back, staring up at the black louring sky with glaring lustreless eyes in the far-away Austrian wood. The raindrops fell upon those eyes, yet they did not shrink or close. The subtle essence which gave the clay its power to feel had fled.

Louis had escaped the Avenger this time; but had he not piled up still another rock to fall upon him in the hereafter?





## CHAPTER IX.

THE very absence of all the society that had so recently enlivened Avonbourne tended to make Pierce fall back upon Noel, and scarcely a day passed when he was not at the Bourne Manor-house. Heloise was not often visible ; she still shunned him ; but he was not disheartened thereby, for he had already learnt, so quick is the mind to discover what it longs to find, that the more emotion she felt towards him, the more she would try to hide it. He remembered the cold touch of her hand in the arched doorway—that very coldness, the perceptible tremour, the rapid withdrawal, all informed him that if her heart was not his, at least he had made some way with her. Else why should she touch his hand at all—they had seen each other before that day—why did her taper fingers involuntarily meet his ? The blood rushed to his temple ; wild hopes surged

through him. He grew bolder, and only wanted an opportunity to take steps of which till now he had not even dreamed. In love the heart is a most sensitive thermometer; the faintest encouragement, and the mercury rises to an altogether disproportionate height, or on the other hand falls as low. The difficulty was to find an opportunity. Noel only saw her at intervals, and then in the presence of Pierce, or some third person; never by any chance alone. For a time he bore this with tolerable equanimity, calm in the belief that if watched for an opening must at last occur; but when weeks lengthened out, and early spring came, his ancient restlessness returned. They were hunting hard and fast now. The sharp frosts had gone, the horses could jump without fear of breaking their legs, and the scent laid beautifully in the damp dewy mornings. The southerly wind and the cloudy sky brightened up the last few weeks of a dull and disheartening season. Therefore they made the most of it. The Duke's hounds met every day almost without exception, now here, now there, leaving no spot untried, and all this

enthusiasm led to some very splendid runs being achieved. Noel was a bold rider; he had ridden in more dangerous chases than these; and Pierce, passionately fond of the sport, old as he was, he missed no meet; his gray head, his beaming face full of health and a subdued species of joviality, was to be seen day by day amongst the crowd of horsemen—ever welcomed heartily and cordially, if not loudly. They thought him an honour to the hunt. Noel made no friends among them. He bowed distantly, nor sought any man. He never volunteered a remark; he answered, and that was all. There seemed nothing genial about him; and his dark swarthy face, with the somewhat stern mouth and glittering eye, was barely English. They did not take to him kindly. It was not long either before they envied him, not only his superb horses, his reckless boldness, but above all things his wondrous good luck. Go at what he would—timber, stone, or fence, water or what not—it was the same. He never fell. This was an unpardonable offence. If as a novice he had rolled over and crushed a hound or two, or

broke some one else's leg, it would have been forgiven, for every one would have had a kind of fellow-feeling; all had fallen in their time, all might fall again. But this unfamiliar good fortune—this inviolability, as it seemed, from accident—made an unfavourable impression. It was a reproach to them. It was as much as to say, 'I am not of thine order;' and the disdainful manner of the man added not a little to the general discontent. They would have given hundreds to see him roll in the dirt. There was even a sort of ill-defined conspiracy among them to unseat him if possible. When he appeared the hounds were taken to the worst and most impracticable country. This, however, they soon abandoned, for it did not upset him, but it materially damaged many of the others. If a chance occurred by which any of them could have cannoned Noel into a deep lime or chalk pit, not one would have missed it. Noel was unconscious of all this. Really and at heart he was the reverse of being ungenial. He was fond of the company of sportsmen and of men of action; he was ready to drink a glass, to

join in any game; but at this time he was full of a passion which absorbed him. The motion, the excitement, the danger of the chase only seemed to more eagerly inflame him. Heloise was his only thought as they raced over the pasture or waited at the corner of the wood. The very freeness, the open frank character of the sport tended to develop his feelings, to bring them out of their retreat, to strengthen them. Action invariably makes a man bolder, more determined, less thoughtful and anticipative of obstacles. When he was speeding along at headlong pace, with the breeze fanning his face, the hounds crying in front, and the blast of the horn echoing from the hills, Noel gave the rein to his imagination and his passion. He seemed as if he were galloping to her arms, as if she beckoned him on. Absorbed in this one great passion he was careless of the people amongst whom he moved; excepting always Pierce. Pierce could not understand the evident dislike shown by the hunt to Noel. He saw it, and wondered at it. To him Noel was invariably attentive, courteous, ready to forward his

views either for pleasure or in more serious matters. Why, then, should the rest so obviously avoid him? It pained good-natured, simple-minded Pierce.

Never once did he suspect that Noel entertained the slightest feeling towards Heloise; how should he? They were never together; they neither played, nor sang, nor rode, nor in any way sought each other's company. The very absence of Heloise from the room argued an utter indifference to his guest; and so blind was Pierce, that once or twice he hinted to her that it was uncourteous, and that she should show him a little more respect.

Noel grew more and more restless—less companionable. It was a hard task to him now even to make himself agreeable to Pierce. The old man was busy now with an idea that had often occurred to him, but which he had never attempted to put into execution: it was to form a garden entirely of wild flowers. He was passionately fond of them—he had been so all his life—and the thought had often occurred to him how sweetly pretty



they would look, and what pleasure he might feel in having a garden completely occupied with them alone. It was difficult to discover their retreats at any other time than in the spring—it was hardly late enough yet; but he busied himself with the foundation of the scheme. He built a rocky mound for the ferns, and beside it a pile of great logs and roots and stumps of trees, in which the tree-ferns and mosses and the parasites might find a congenial soil. These he erected where some tall elms overshadowed the gardens, so that they might be sheltered from the heat, and grow in the coolness and the damp. Then he prepared a piece of ground for the plants delighting in a sandy soil, and another strip full of chalk and rubble, and a third he laid down with the thymy turf from the downs. The idea, as he worked at it, gradually grew upon him, and he ceased to hunt so continuously, and Noel went alone.

But just at this time an interruption occurred. There came a letter in a blue envelope one morning, addressed to Pierce, in the unmistakable handwriting of a soli-

citor. He opened it, and an exclamation of astonishment burst from his lips. Heloise glanced up from her coffee with a look of inquiry.

‘Lord Henry is dead!’

‘Indeed!’

‘The Lestrangle estates come to us now.’

This was how it was: Pierce Lestrangle, of Bourne Manor, Avonbourne, was the representative and head of the younger branch of the family—called younger by mere heraldic etiquette, for it had been a distinct family for fully two hundred years. The elder branch, which had taken the major part of the possessions of the original founders, and had added very largely to them by intermarriages with heiresses, had entirely separated from the younger, and, as often happens, in the course of generations a void had sprung up between them. They neither visited nor in any way spoke of each other except as utter strangers. This Henry Lord Lestrangle was the last of the elder branch, and he had never married. Since, however, the families had so long been separated, the idea of a possible

reversion to him or his heirs had never occurred to Pierce. Henry Lestrangle had been a physician—that is, nominally. He learnt the profession, not as a means of gaining money, of which he had plenty, but out of intense love of science. He practised a little—he studied more; he was, moreover, a man of the most original genius. Thus it was that he chanced to cure a patient—his own guest—who was a cabinet minister. Two years afterwards he was made a peer. This was how the title came to be his.

Not even after he had carefully read and re-read the solicitor's long letter, and satisfied himself that he was in all reality not only the possessor of a vast estate, but also a nobleman; not even after he had explained it all to wondering Heloise, could he realise that it was a fact. He, Pierce, who had all his life been a simple country gentleman, of moderate estate only, holding no position, asserting no claim to grandeur, had in a moment ascended in the social scale almost as high as was possible. Though so recently created, the title gave some social precedence. Then

there was the property, the vast acreage, the enormous rent-roll, the numerous tenantry,—these conferred an importance which could not be ignored. And all these had fallen to an old man busied with making a garden of simple wild flowers. It was days before he could realise the new position he occupied. Had there been any necessity for his attending Lord Henry's funeral, had he been obliged to be present at the opening of the deeds, or anything of that kind, it would have been brought home to his mind; but it so happened that the dead man had left particular instructions that Pierce, if possible, was to be kept in utter ignorance till after he was buried. So it was that Pierce, who rarely read a newspaper, and never the list of deaths, knew nothing of the matter till a fortnight after the physician was consigned to his tomb. There was no need for him to hurry away to these new possessions in a distant county, to assert his right or take formal possession; there was no dispute, no cavil—it was his. But he did not hasten to seize it. Now that the truth had come home to him, now that

people drove up daily to congratulate him, Lord Lestrangle (he had given strict injunctions that no one of his household should use the title, from which he shrank) was not altogether elated ; in fact, he felt depressed. His was not a mind to quarrel with the decrees of Heaven ; but as he cast his gaze backwards along the course of his life, he could not but remember the many unfulfilled aspirations—the desire to travel, the natural longing to see other climes ; and still more than this, the ideas that had occurred to him, the great and glorious things he could have done, if only this Power—this money—had been his when he was young and full of life and vigour, untrammelled by the iron chains of age and habit and accumulated circumstances. It was a melancholy and depressing thought—one that he could not shake off at once ; so that he did not hasten to seize his good fortune, but rather lingered and shrank from it. Had not this happened he might have died contented, but it awoke vain regrets even in his peaceful and well-ordered mind.

About a week after this Heloise came

rushing into his study, to ask if he had thought of Ella.

‘Of whom?’ said Pierce, evidently quite in the dark.

‘Of Ella. Don’t you remember Lord Henry’s protégée—the slight girl we saw with him once at the railway-station? O, papa, you must do something for her. She will be homeless; perhaps she has gone already. I ought to have remembered her before.’

And Heloise grew hot and flushed with the thought of her carelessness. Pierce was shocked at his own inhumanity. He wrote at once, and despatched it by one of his servants, who was instructed to proceed express by railway—that would be quicker than the post. They waited eagerly for the reply; it came at last, late in the evening of the following day. These were the words, written in a thin peculiar hand, very slightly flourished, not unlike the angular manuscript in the registers and documents of the seventeenth century:

‘Dear Lord Lestrangle,—I have to thank



you most sincerely for your kind and thoughtful letter, but I feel obliged to decline your invitation. My late friend and patron has happily provided for me amply, and, with every respect, I prefer to lead a life of independence. Lord Henry purchased me an annuity of 250*l.* some time previously to his demise; and he did more—he educated me in an art from which I am enabled to draw a considerable income. It is my intention to travel on the Continent. I leave here immediately, and I must request your forgiveness for my neglect to quit before.—I am, with the deepest respect, yours very faithfully,

‘ELLA FURNIVALE.’

‘And she is hardly twenty-one,’ said Heloise. ‘I never read such a letter—so independent, so off-hand. This art—it is painting; I remember something of a picture of hers in the Royal Academy. To travel on the Continent alone at her age! The old doctor has given her some of his queer notions; don’t you think so?’

‘Most probably; still I do not blame her

for wishing to feel independent. I am glad Lord Henry left it in her power to be so. Perhaps we may even yet be of some assistance to her, dear.'

So Ella passed out of sight, and Pierce began to think at last of visiting his new estates. Heloise begged him to take her with him; she dreaded so much being left alone with Noel. Pierce readily consented, and the day was fixed for their journey. '*La femme propose, et l'homme dispose*'—a man interfered and upset the whole matter.

It was the last day of the season: the meet was crowded. Pierce had delayed his departure on purpose to be present on the occasion. The Duke himself was out. The fox broke cover well, and raced away, as it happened, for the downs. Now this, though it seemed the very best thing that could happen at first, since everybody could follow where there were no hedges or ditches, yet soon turned out the very reverse; for the brute went straight away like an arrow, and the incessant hills pumped the horses, especially as they had to cross miles of arable

land. The fox ran steadily on; such a run had been rarely known, but the chase thinned as rapidly. In two hours there were but seven in the field, amongst whom were the Duke, who had changed horses once already, the huntsman, who had done the same, and Noel. About half an hour more disposed of the other five, and left Noel and the huntsman alone, speeding along the springy down with a fierce rivalry; for it was obvious that the fox could hold out but little longer; his brush drooped and swept the grass, and he had swerved from the direct course, and was now making a sweep to the right, evidently in search of the vale and of a friendly copse. Noel had a general idea that the valley lay on the right, but he had no knowledge of the locality; he guided his course therefore partly by the hounds, and partly by the motion of the scarlet jacket on his left. It seemed to him that scarlet jacket was making a long detour to the left, and in the wild desire to forge to the front—to be alone, the first—Noel gave way to his own impression, and wheeling a little to the right, sought to cut off a

corner by galloping through a field of beans. His weary horse urged its way heavily through the beans, snorting and plunging along, flecked with foam and with a drooping head.

Noel, looking over his left shoulder to watch scarlet jacket, was not so much on the look-out as he should have been; so that it came on him like a horrible and frightful apparition,—a snort and a sudden rearing of his horse as the animal tried to stop itself, and rose up almost upright upon its hind legs.

The fore feet, where were they? Reaching right over a precipice!

In that moment of intense sensation Noel saw the distant vale, the trees and woods, the pasture-fields, the dim horizon, towns and villages and church-towers, blue smoke from the hamlets, windmills revolving—a panorama of landscapes.

It rushed up to meet him, he knew not how; the air rushed by his ears—he felt as if he was taking a tremendous leap. Then there was a jar, a shock, a sharp pain, and

unconsciousness. And all this had occupied barely a second.

The chalk cliff fell twenty feet sheer from the edge of the field, and he had galloped right over it. Then at the bottom of the cliff there was a ledge, along which a narrow road wound; below this a deep 'combe,' or steep down, dropped another hundred feet, steep as the roof of a house.

The horse fell on its legs on this road, and the legs instantly snapped up under it like icicles, and the animal came down on its belly; but that saved Noel, else the hard road must have brained him on the spot. He rolled off senseless, and lay in a rut. The horse raised its head and writhed in agony. That writhe overbalanced it, for it was on the edge of the road, and over it fell and rolled with fearful velocity down the steep and slippery combe fully a hundred feet, crash through a hedge at the bottom, and there lay still as a stone, and all in a heap—dead.

In after days a loving heart that came to that spot to see it, and to realise the horrible danger, grew angry, and even thirsted for

revenge; for why had not the huntsman, the man in the scarlet jacket, shouted and warned him? Instinct told her that it was jealousy—hatred of a bolder rider and a better steed—the outcome of that general feeling against Noel.

The senseless body, jolted about for an hour and a half in a cart without springs, came to Bourne Manor just as the bell rang for dinner. Heloise, coming down the staircase, looked out of the window as she passed, and saw what made her heart stand still—a cart coming up the drive, where no carts ever came, with a black heap in it. At first she thought it was Pierce, for he had returned while she was dressing unknown to her. Then she heard Pierce at the foot of the stairs asking if Noel had returned; then she fell, too, senseless on the landing, for it shot through her like a bullet. It was Noel in the cart, and he was—dead, or he would not lie so still, heaped up in that ghastly way.

They put him on a bed, and they sent for doctors in post-haste. Thus it was that Pierce did not go to visit his estates as soon



as he had arranged; thus it was that when he did go, a week later—for the solicitors urged him to—he left Heloise behind to see to their unfortunate guest.





## CHAPTER X.

WHAT shifts, what ingenious contrivances and innumerable excuses Heloise invented to be near and with Noel as he lay maimed and agonised, and at times insensible, upon his bed! That is at first, for she imagined all the household were watching her; but after a time her mind grew accustomed to it, and she entered his room boldly and openly as a matter of right, as the mistress of the mansion looking after her guest, as a matron too, and not to be deterred by any ideas of false delicacy. Who could analyse her heart, as she sat by that bedside, and say which most predominated—love or dread; dread lest he should never recover? For there were days when he seemed infinitely worse, and beyond the skill of man or the renovating powers of nature. Yet sometimes a secret pleasure stole through Heloise's mind—that she might now

look at him, watch him, tend him, be something of service to him, without fear, openly. So great was the delight in serving him, in ever so small a degree, that it at intervals overcame even her fear, and made her happy. Then there were relapses of doubt and uncertainty ; but it was always Noel, always. Her mind was occupied and bent upon him, to the total exclusion of everything and everybody else. Her love lit up the chamber, and made it a holy place. Yet, you will say, it was an unholy and wicked love. That may be ; nevertheless it was love of the deepest, intensest kind—an almost *maternal* love—and it did fill the chamber with a presence that soothed everything, even the irritable nerves of the sufferer. This love dignified everything. Even what was repulsive in the sick chamber became sacred and beautiful under her touch. But her greatest delight of all was to watch him ; to sit in the great window-sill, with the monotonous sound of the driving spring rain beating against the panes, and pretend to read a novel which was lying upon her knee. Her eyes were not on him, and yet she could see

him, feel him, and she knew by instinct whether he slept or turned, if his eyes were open or closed. It gave her a peaceful slumberous sensation; she seemed as if in this sick chamber she had at last found a haven of rest. Here her heart was quiet; no doubts, no torturing suspicions, no questionings of conscience; nothing but peace, quiet, rest. It was slumberous, it was happy; and this while she was wild at times, maddened with alternate hopes and fears, as Noel's state varied.

His most dangerous state was only just beginning. His arm had been broken in the very place where it had pained him so long, just where it had imperfectly joined again after the matchlock bullet smashed it years ago. The bone had cracked there like a pipe-stem—snapped across instantly. He was bruised and shaken; but the worst part was his head. A flint had lain on the road where he fell, and had it not been for his hat his skull would have been crushed in much as a spoon dashes through an egg-shell. As it happened, the hat intervened between the skull and the stone, and deadened the blow. But it was a terrible

place, not only from the gash and the bruise, but from the horrible aspect it had, as if it was indented, as the side of a teapot might be. Heloise's heart grew sick when she saw this; it acted upon her like violent medicine; she nearly fainted again. But she only saw it once; entering the room by mistake, when the doctor was there examining the wound. She had to lean against the wall when she got outside. This flint had done the mischief. There was a stupidity about the patient. He seemed dazed when he awoke, or rather when he opened his eyes he appeared to be still asleep; the brain was in a state of torpor. He could recognise no one; he only uttered an inarticulate noise when he tried to speak. That strange gurgling sound went straight to Heloise's heart. Her blood stood still in the veins, her face paled, her knees trembled. Yet she would not quit her post—always by the window, waiting.

Noel remembered nothing after that moment when he saw the landscape rise up towards him, as it seemed, in a violent convulsion of nature. All from that moment was a blank,

till he slowly struggled back into consciousness about eight days after they laid him on the bed at Bourne Manor. His physical organisation had been awake, so to speak, long before that. The heart had beaten, the veins had flowed with blood, the pulse had throbbed, the lungs had inspired, the very eyes had opened. The material part was alive. But the mind was dead. He was not conscious that his heart was beating, or his lungs inspiring. It was like a deep sleep. At last came the painful awakening. It resembled the dawning of the morning.

Noel had a faint *feeling* of light; such a feeling as the partially blind have; he saw a dim grey twilight—as we see a greyness indicative of the coming dawn, early in the morning after the cocks have crowed the second time. For a while this was all; all his consciousness was in his head. His soul seemed to be there alone; he was not conscious that he had a body; his soul was confined to that spot. But in time he grew to feel the pain of his arm, the ache of the setting bone, the sharp twinge, as he moved in a



helpless way, like one walking in the thick darkness. This was the first indication he had that he still retained a body; at least, it would have been the first indication if he could have thought and reasoned; but he did not think. He had no power of thought. He did not say, 'This is light; this is pain.' He did not recognise it; but he felt it. But after a while there shot up to his shoulder the sharp twinge of the broken arm; and then, for the first time, he regained his consciousness. The light grew brighter, and, as it were all in a minute, he *knew* where he was. There was Heloise sitting in the window-seat. He gazed at her dreamily; he longed for her to turn and look at him; he eagerly desired her to come and sit near him. Yet he did not attempt to speak; the memory that he had such a power as the power of speech did not occur to him.

Presently the nurse came and moved his wounded arm, and a sharp twinge forced a low cry from his lips. Then he regained speech, and said faintly: 'Heloise.' She came to him instantly, and hung over him,

her face beaming, her lips quivering. He was better, he would recover, he had spoken; and his first word was her name. It set her heart in a glow. Almost involuntarily she laid her hand on his forehead. She had been sitting so long in the window that she had grown cold; her hand was cool and refreshing. Then, too, for the first time, Noel was aware of the intense heat which seemed to surround him. The coolness of her hand supplied the contrast—just as people who have been blind cannot judge of distance till they have found a fulcrum, some fixed spot, and learn how to correct the sight by the mental powers. He moved uneasily; but he did not moan or cry out now. He had recovered his consciousness; he would not moan in the deepest pain. It was only when he was unconscious that he cried out. Now his mind had returned, he subdued it. The moan only came when the physical organisation alone existed; directly the mind came into play all the old instincts of courage and fortitude returned. Even the touch of her hand could not keep him still, now that he was conscious

of the intense heat. It grew on him ; the atmosphere of the room seemed to be made of *wool*, so to say, through which no air could pass. He was in a high fever, in fact. He would have rolled from side to side ; but the pain of the wounded arm stopped him. He had to remain still in one place till that spot grew intolerable. How shall any one describe the horrors of fever ? That night was a period of unutterable torture. The feeble glimmer of the night-lights lit up what seemed to his distempered vision a hellish apartment used by the Inquisition. They were killing him by heat. The air was rarefied and heated till it took away from him the power to breathe ; the atmosphere weighed upon him, laid on his breast as if it was a lump of ponderous lead. The ceiling pressed it down ; the whole weight of the house was on him. The clothes suffocated him, they clung to him, and stopped up every pore in his skin. Now his head swelled, till it felt like an enormous vacuum—a vast globe, filling the whole bed, and his soul and mind and sensation a mere tiny speck within it ; and then it fell in ; and a horrible

sense of crushing came upon him, as if his head was placed between two boards, and pressed together till the bones of the skull bent. His eyes ached, as if they had been open for weeks without closing. His hands felt large, puffed up, as if the blood would burst through the veins. He could not keep his feet still; they fidgeted perpetually. Then came a feeling as if his eyes would start out of his head. In vain he tried to sleep. His mind was at work now; and he recollected that probably if he could sleep he should be better; he should escape this awful heat. What he must do was to lie still, and close his eyes till slumber came. He tried this; he kept still till he felt he should be smothered; then he moved again, and all his work was at an end. Forgetfulness would not come. And thus it went on, all through the dreary hours of the night. Still the same horrible oppressing heat—a heat which nothing could cool. He was better in the daytime; but the nights were an ever-increasing misery to him. He slept a little in the daytime, a restless, *surface* sleep, waking at the least sound; an unre-

freshing sleep. He thought that, perhaps, this made it more difficult to slumber at night. To avoid this he resolved not to sleep in the day; but it was of no use. He was ten times more restless than ever. And Heloise? He saw her, but he did not think of her; this heat occupied his whole being.

And so it went on, till the extreme prostration reduced him to utter speechlessness; and the doctor whispered that he must die. Noel that afternoon was lying as peaceful as if he was already dead. He lay on his side, with his face towards the window, still, silent, motionless; gazing, as it seemed, in dreamy abstraction at the light. Heloise sat and watched him. This peacefulness was terrible to her. It was as if he had given up the struggle, as if he had succumbed, and battled no more for life. The love that was in her rose up, and would not be denied.

The nurse was about to get a little refreshment; she looked round the room stealthily, and stole slowly across to Noel. He did not appear to see her come; there was no light in his eye, no change in the face, no motion, no

variation from that trance-like state. She bent down, and fondled his hand; she bent lower, and her tears fell on his face; still lower, till she kissed him on his lips. Then she started back, not with guilt, as it seemed, but as if amazed. Had she really heard aright? Had *he* spoken? Was it really a low, almost inaudible whisper that had reached her ear? The words were these, or seemed to be these:

‘Air, air, or I die.’

She bent her head down close again, and listened. Yes, it was true; he spoke; he whose voice had not been heard for four days, how weak, how low it was now! Heloise, wild with excitement, ran for the nurse, and begged her to assist in carrying him to the window.

‘Window, ma’am?’ said that stolid creature. ‘Why, the doctor ordered he should be kept from draughts; to catch cold would kill him.’

She would not do it. Heloise frantically tried to drag the bed along. The nurse calmly sat on it; and Heloise could not move her



weight. Heloise rushed out of the room, with her hands clasped, her eyes dilated, wild, to find some one to assist her. At the foot of the stairs she met Pierce. She had telegraphed for him so soon as Noel was in danger. More by gesture than by words she made him understand, and begged him to assist her. Pierce looked grave, graver still when the nurse said, that if it was done *she* should leave the room; it should not be on her responsibility.

‘Whoever heard of moving a man to a window, and him only just out of a blazing fever, and a-dying?’

‘Dying, you wretch!’ screamed Heloise, ready to kill her for uttering the ominous word. ‘He’s not dying! O papa, papa, do help; come, listen to him!’

And she dragged Pierce to the bed, and made him lean down, and listen at Noel’s lips. Sure enough, that was what the injured man begged for, repeating it slowly and constantly, with his eyes towards the light. Pierce hesitated. Heloise seized the bed, to pull at it.

‘Stay,’ said Pierce; ‘at any rate it cannot hurt him to put the window open.’

Heloise had it wide in a minute. A draught of cool air, fresh from passing over April pastures, rushed into the room, fanning the patient’s pale brow. His lips opened, his eyes glistened; there was an expression in his face. He seemed to drink it in. They left the window so for half an hour. Then Heloise seized Pierce’s arm, and pointed, with terror in her eyes. Noel’s eyes were closed; his chin had fallen; she deemed him dead. Pierce went to him, felt his side. The heart beat very, very faintly. Just then the doctor came; he looked at the patient, laid his hand on his mouth, and beckoned them to come out of the room. Heloise obeyed, ready to sink, believing that Noel was passing away from her. Once outside, the doctor shut the door.

‘He is asleep,’ he said. ‘He will live.’

On her knees that night Heloise thanked the Almighty. Her tears flowed abundantly; she bowed her head, even to the dust, in intense gratitude. For a fortnight—while Noel was in the balance—she had not prayed; her

heart was too dry. Now she praised and acknowledged the Power that had saved him, and asked forgiveness for her neglect to kneel before.

Was it wicked of her to praise for *his* life? If it was, she could not help it.





## CHAPTER XI.

THE warm breath of spring and the genial sunshine have almost the power of the 'spirit moving on the face of the waters'—brooding till the barren chaos grew instinct with life. The dark green mosses are full of tiny insects hastening hither and thither through this to them enormous forest, and the blades of grass are bent down with the weight of creatures trying to crawl up into the sunshine. The trees are awake—they have not only opened their eyes, the buds, but have put forth their bright green leaves. How many shades of green there are ! Even this tall oak, not yet in full leaf, has a tinge of a bronzy green in its coppery boughs.

Noel and Heloise were walking slowly upon the sward in the sunny morning. The tall pine-trees on their left emitted a resinous odour, sweet and spicy, scenting the warm

air, and high up in their branches the squirrels leapt, and hid themselves behind the trunk. The ground beneath these pines was barren, covered with millions upon millions of brown leaflets—spiky leaflets—slowly decaying, and killing all vegetation in those shady recesses: so that by stooping they could see along the level earth far on among the trunks, and watch the rabbits running to and fro, and here and there a pheasant making a stately retreat. There is something exquisitely beautiful about a fir-tree. It rises up so straight and high, each branch sloping downwards, and diminishing in regular proportion—shorter and less sloping as the top is neared. They are beautiful, graceful trees, to my eye far superior to any other that grows on English ground. There is a mysticism about them: they seem to typify something, though it is hard to define what, unless the cones are taken in the Assyrian sense as the symbol of the power of nature—that recuperative, renovating power which even at that moment was working in Noel's limbs, bringing back to him little by little the old strength. He still

walked with a stick, leaning on it heavily, but his face had lost its sickly pallor. It was not yet as brown and healthy as of old; but there was a glow on it—the glow of the air, the sunlight—the reflection of the morning. Never in all the course of his life had he felt so entirely peaceful—so much at rest—so calm—and so happy. There was much in this of the returning vigour, but more still in the presence of Heloise. They spoke rarely, and then on the most trifling topics, as they sauntered slowly on, but there was a feeling between them. This illness had done it. All the barriers were broken down. They did not attempt to conceal what they felt from themselves nor from each other. They knew by instinct that each was aware of the other's passion. Not a word passed—no demonstration, no reference; but as they walked together beside the pinewood, breathing the scented air, they felt that their love was mutual, full, and overflowing. So it was that they spoke rarely, and then on indifferent matters, for love is silent. Nominally they were at work for Pierce—searching out wild



flowers, ferns, and mosses, to adorn his garden of Nature as he called it; his garden of wild flowers only. In truth they were searching out the wild flowers—the graceful ferns of passion, filling their garden with beauty, and colour, and odour. Noel's eyes dwelt almost always upon Heloise. Heloise rarely looked at him—her gaze was upon the trees, the grass, and the sky. These had been to her of old time her lovers—these too she had wooed. Wooed the sun, whose ardour in return burnt her cheek; wooed the wind, who in return filled her with grace and lively ease of motion. But in all these—in the sun, and sky, and breeze, in the lofty rolling downs, in the deep shadow of the forest—there was still a something wanting, and as she had gazed upon them, and drunk in their unutterable meanings, she sighed, she knew not why. Now she knew: with Noel, her enjoyment in nature, in the trees, and the sunlight, reached its highest and most exquisite pitch. She felt with them. Felt with the fir-tree and the chestnut the delight of springing into life—the pleasure of putting forth the green bud,

and watching it expand into the perfect leaf—itself a marvel of beauty of design—just as the mother watches her child grow and develop in size and proportion. Felt with the sun his warm, genial love of the earth and its living things, and with the sky its brooding beauty. It hung over the earth—a blue dome, painted here and there by the hand of a divine Michael Angelo, with flecks of graceful cloud floating along, the thistledown of heaven. The sun was the window in this grand dome, through which the light of the upper ether streamed in upon the earth. She could feel with the squirrel on the topmost boughs of the fir-tree—she could enter into his pleasure, and enjoy with him the sway, the gentle swinging motion of the delicate branches yielding to the breeze. Whatever living creature, be it plant or flower, animal or insect, on which her eyes rested, her soul seemed to enter into its existence, and she felt with and understood it. This delicate faculty of perception, this exquisitely sensitive organisation, which is the attribute of the true poet, gave her an intense but indescribable delight. It was as if

her own enjoyment of the sunlight and the spring were multiplied a hundredfold—as if her own identity were divided into innumerable portions, each an ‘I,’ each basking in the sunshine. She did not attempt to communicate these feelings to Noel. Heloise was a poet by nature, but a poet to whom expression was denied. Hers was the plastic nature, the delicate and sensitive organisation, upon which the words of the singer acted as the breeze upon the fir-tree bough, swaying it hither and thither, putting it into graceful motion. Her soul rippled up like water before the wind, and glittered with innumerable points of light reflected from the sun. But she could not speak—could not originate these impulses. She was a passive poet. Her being was that of a harp played upon by nature, emitting the softest, most enchanting sound, but originating nothing in itself. She could not play upon herself. So she was silent.

Noel felt none of these refined pleasures; the glow of returning health, the strength that stole through his veins and along his limbs, with the delight of watching

her face,—this was enough for him. It was indeed a face to watch. Be not too harsh—do not judge her too severely—this artless poet-child, who never could be in equity dealt with as others should be. Noel watched her face, as she had watched his when he lay helpless in pain. Slowly there grew upon his mind a sense that he could not understand her. The radiance upon her countenance came from he knew not where; the emotions that were reflected there were not such as he had known—they came from no source of which he had the key. They flowed up from a well at which he had never drunk. A superstitious feeling, almost reverential, took possession of him: he felt as though he had been walking by the side of an immortal, of one of those divine beings which in the old time came down to mortals, and brought with them an indefinable Presence. His feelings towards her underwent a change. He had looked upon her as a child, as something weaker, lower than himself—something to be protected and watched over. Now it dawned upon him that she was in reality higher and

more divine than he was—that she could watch over and protect him. His was the lower existence. So he came to watch her motions almost with reverence, as if her step was holy, as if her face shone with divine light, and a halo went about her. Heloise knew but one thing—that she was happy. It was like this that they searched for the wild flowers: or rather Heloise did, pointing them out to Noel, showing him their beauties and their graces, teaching him their names and histories. For these wild flowers have a history. The orchids and splendid aristocrats of the greenhouse and conservatory are like the vast plains of America, the steppes of Russia, the boundless plains of Australia—they are beautiful, but they have no history. There is no human interest about them. But Greece—that small territory, only half a dozen parishes in comparison with the continents—has for us a charm and an enduring beauty because of its human interest; because of the passions and the subtlety, the wars and the hatreds, and all the circle of man's joys and griefs, hopes and fears, that were there enacted in



their unrestrained fulness. And so our wild flowers of the copse, the meadows, and the downs have about each and all of them a human aroma—an odour of the Past. They have with them the associations from our childhood, when we played amongst them, gathered them by multitudes in sport. They bring with them strange tales of centuries since, when knights wore them on their helmets, when ladies rode a-hawking over them. They have a history, or rather a mythology, of their own. Pierce's instructions were that they should not disdain the humblest—not even the buttercup and the daisy—and he wanted, too, the very grasses, each and all. Noel, whose life had been spent in violence and in motion, marvelled at the infinite variety of the life that he had trampled under his feet and disdainfully passed away from. In one day—one single walk—Heloise gathered, or rather took up root and all, no less than five-and-thirty varieties of common grass. These Noel carried in a basket provided for that purpose. Heloise said there were nearly sixty different grasses; but they had much more diffi-



culty after the thirty-five. Some of them had not yet come up; others only grew in distant spots; all were hard to find. But it was of the flowers that Heloise told him most—of the monkish legends, the strange old superstitions of the days gone by, all of which Pierce had taught her in childhood. Day by day the garden grew; and day by day the love that was in them grew stronger and stronger.

Noel was at Knoylelands now, but he rode over every day, usually before lunch, and stayed there till late in the evening. Even then he could barely tear himself away. Frequently he walked, in order that after he had left the mansion he might still linger near, watching for the light in her window. His favourite spot was away from the highway. He left this, and went in among the fields, and made a circuit till he stood near the edge of the garden under a great oak-tree. There he leant against the trunk—the sturdy iron-bound trunk—with its thick bark and gray lichens. Overhead the innumerable stars shone down, glittering through the spaces between the branches. In the south a great

planet glowed like a ball of molten silver till it paled as the full moon slowly rose over the downs, casting a huge shadow of the oak-tree on the damp grass. Lines of light clouds lingered in the sky towards the east, rippled like the sand at the edge of a pool where the tiny wavelets break, but these were rippled with the yellow light of the moon. The grass at his feet glistened and glittered with emeralds, the dew-drops reflecting the moonlight. Bourne Manor was in the shadow of the downs, dark and solemn, save and excepting the southern gable, where the light fell, bringing it out into sharp relief. Far on the left of this, and lower down, there shone out one pale lamp—paled by the curtain—and this Noel knew as Heloise's chamber. She had chosen years ago this room, because its great window faced the south and let in the sun and the light, which to her were as meat and drink.

How should Noel, the rude and violent soldier, the traveller, the *travailleur* over many deserts—how should he, the man of action, analyse his thoughts and feelings? How

could he tell the names of the passions, and their varying phases, as they surged through his breast? He could have no more separated and defined them than he could have translated into human language the moan of the waves as they broke upon the beach. But those passions, those changes and phases, did surge through him. He knew not how he spoke it; but so it was at last.

Where the nut-tree hedges met in a green angle; where a great chestnut-tree reared over them its candelabra of blossoms; where the bracken grew luxuriously in the unseen ditch—unseen because filled with brambles and with ferns—where the sunlight came softly, and the breeze was still—this was where it was done, where their fatal words were spoken. They were sitting on the sward—on the soft moss—sitting so still and so silent that the mice peeped out of their tiny burrows, and ran about among the grass, darting hither and thither. A rabbit came to the mouth of his cave, and sat there in wonder, gazing at them out of his full black eyes. A pair of wild doves came into the chestnut-tree,

and softly cooed at intervals. A great black-bird with his 'tawny bill' splashed himself in a rill not three yards from their feet, and then sat on a bough, and plumed his feathers, and uttered his loud and defiant cry. The shy kingfisher flew over them on his way to his nest—a flying rainbow, glittering with crimson and blue—a streak of azure passing across the sight, as if he had been bathing in the sky. They were so still and silent, so peaceful, that all nature saw it; all these tiny creatures, these mice, and rabbit, and doves, and shy kingfisher, saw that it was a truce, that they had nothing to fear, for these human beings were in accord with them. But in the full glare of the sunlight, when it fell on the bare sandy mound of the hedge behind them—out of sight, yet there—lay coiled up a green and spotted snake, basking in the heat.

Noel knew not how his arm came round her. She lay in his arms, as if asleep—unresisting, still, only he could feel the heaving of her bosom, the throbbing of her heart. Her ripe rich lips were a little open; he gazed at them; he drew near; he fastened upon

them. They did not move; they did not avoid him. Another, and yet another. As the mice and the doves were unconscious of them, so they grew unconscious of the sun and the sky; unconscious of all but the thrill of unutterable love. The subtle fire ran through them; their souls grew as one. Her breath came in long deep gasps, till at last her lips dropped from his, her head bowed, and she buried it in his breast, hiding away her face. There he held her, gently stroking down the lovely hair, whose curling tendrils clung to his fingers.

The shadows moved. The spaces of light and the spaces of darkness, or the lack of light, the shadow of the interlaced branches of the chesnut-tree, moved round and farther out into the field, till the hot beams of the early summer sun showered down upon them. Still they moved not, spoke not. Only she clung to him—he bent over her. The sunbeams glistened on her glossy hair. She held his hand—not the one that strayed among her hair, but the other—and her lips were wandering over it, he could feel her warm breath



upon it. The shadows moved. The topmost branches of a tall pine-tree intercepted the rays of the sun, and the shadows fell across them once more. Still they moved not, spoke not. He saw and felt nothing but her; she felt him only. That sense of each other was all; and it was enough; more would have been pain. The shadows moved. One streak of sunlight lit up the lower extremity of her hair. One arm was thrown out—the sleeve had got drawn up—and the soft white skin shone like marble in the sunlight. Then he became conscious of a warm stream trickling down his hand—his hand that she had kissed. It was her tears. That woke him—then he spoke. Hurriedly, passionately, in low piercing tones that stirred her very soul. He was pleading—she could not answer—pleading with her to go with him away, away, no matter where, but ever into the sunshine. She listened and answered not; till suddenly she started away from him, and rose up and turned to go; and, silently rebuked, he followed her.

But the fatal words had been spoken; the fatal seed sown, the idea implanted. Hence-



forth this desire to go forth with him was ever in her heart.

The snake which had crawled out into the grass came to the spot where they had sat, and crushed it down, and there coiled himself up in the full glare of the sunlight, for the shadows had moved again.





## CHAPTER XII.

WHILE Noel and Heloise were rapt in that long embrace beneath the horse-chestnut tree in its wealth of blossoms, another pair were wandering side by side, but not hand in hand, in the Bois de la Cambre, Brussels. They had passed beyond the limit of civilisation, wandered beyond the laid-out drives and walks notified to the visitors as *allée*, *chaussée*, on the direction-posts; they had got away from the sham lakes, from the noise of wheels and the laughter of the gay pleasure-seekers; away, too, from the corks and broken bottles of the British tourist. The smooth drives had vanished behind them; they had gone in among the beeches. The path was barely wide enough for them to walk side by side—a mere green track strewn with the beech-mast of the previous autumn, entangled at times with the long shoots thrown out by the

briers, whose young prickles had not yet had time to harden. The thick roofing of leaves was impervious to the sun, and they walked in a crypt of shadow; but the warmth of the spring penetrated into the deep forest, and surrounded them with its genial glow. The beech trunks rose up on either hand, smooth and round, dotted here and there with broad bands of gray lichen, and clothed at the foot with green moss. Their boughs met overhead, forming a pointed arch, which extended as far as the eye could see, till the effect of perspective lessened its distinctness, and the path seemed to lose itself in a wall of leaves which receded as they advanced. There was not a sound; the wind was still, and not a branch creaked nor a leaf rustled. No sportive rabbit crossed their path, no bird chattered in the recesses of the wood. Slowly they walked on—on—into the depth of the gloomy shadow, till the path split into two, the one diverging at an angle from the other, and each overarched in the same way with meeting beech branches. At the very spot of the divergence there was a broken trunk.

A great beech had grown unsound and rotten within, and the blast of the winter storms had twisted it off—snapped it about ten feet from the ground—and the dead trunk lay across the path on the left hand, with its boughs crushed beneath it. The stem stood upright, gaunt and ragged at the top, where a huge splinter pointed at the sky. But the parasites, the green mosses, and the tree-ferns had found their rooting-place already where the tree had been rotten within, and long creepers were winding their way about the branches of the fallen trunk. There the gaunt stem stood, a sentinel in the way, challenging all who passed. Here there was an opening in the leaf-roof caused by the fall of this giant—this pillar of the blue dome of the sky—and the sunlight fell full upon the upright stem, bringing it out into bright relief. Beyond it the two pathways branched off—caves of dark shadow—going no one knew how deep into the wood. There was a streak of blue sky overhead, and the earth was covered with moss.

Ella paused here, and took from her com-

panion her sketching materials. He stretched himself on the ground and began to study a book from his pocket, while she drew and studied the beauty of the scene before her till it was photographed in her mind. This was Ella Furnivale, the late Lord Lestrangle's protégée; this, on the grass, was her friend Claudius Lovel—neither her husband, her lover, nor her brother, but her friend.

Carelessly walking through the wood, Ella's hair had caught in a brier; the hooks of the branch held tight in the convoluted folds, and down it came, and away rolled one frisette, while another hung in the air. Down, too, fell her own beautiful hair, far down to her very waist in ripples of pale gold, till her face seemed like a portrait set in a gilded frame. Even Ella was not exempt entirely from the short-sightedness of her sex. To roll up and twist and conceal such a wealth of beauty, to cover it with plaited bundles of false hair, filthy stuff taken from no one knows where or from what head,—what madness, what insanity! These bundles of false rubbish, these disgusting pads, are not only bad in

themselves (possibly even dangerous, despite all the precautions taken in their manufacture), but they kill and destroy the natural covering of the head. Young ladies at five-and-twenty complain that their heads are growing bald, that the hair splits at the end and will not grow, cut it as often as they may. The comb each morning drags out a handful of hair, which they look upon with dismay; for each morning diminishes the already scanty stock, and no new springs up to supply its place. Then they rush off to the chemist, or the barber, who recommends some patent renovator, some marvellous balm and oil of Heaven knows what, which will produce a crop that Absalom might envy. The chemist knows better than this; but it is his interest to push the sale, for the profits are tremendous, the demand ever increasing; for the more that is used the more will be wanted, for the simple reason that these oils and balms kill what little life still remains in the hair of the foolish virgin who uses them. For the hair is alive; it is a living growing thing—a plant, if you please; it is a tube, as most of you



know in these days, of course. All young ladies have seen a microscope; they have seen a hair magnified; they know it is a tube—a plant—with its roots, its sap and juices, its exuding oil, but it never occurs to them to apply this knowledge. This is the great fault of our days. Our forefathers had but few facts to build upon, but they studied these facts and applied them till they had exhausted their uses. But we, with a wealth, an almost illimitable ocean of facts, pass them by, throw them aside without a thought into a dustbin—it's only a microscope, only a magnified hair, a matter for a moment's wonder, a mere show got up for our amusement. Depend upon it, its Creator did not get that slender and delicate tube up for mere show, as a toy to look at in the microscope, as a fashionable amusement to while away a moment of *ennui* while the ices were being brought or the champagne uncorked. It is a real living thing, having its birth, its life, and its death—as much a living thing as the human being is that bears it about with her. But why describe the physiological structure

of what is familiar to every fashionable young lady? This is how they treat this living creature the hair, the most delicate and sensitive of plants. They comb it; so far so good, provided the comb does not rake hard at the roots, and *start* them, if not pull them up. You may do as much harm by pulling a flower half out of the flower-pot, and kill it quite as quickly, as if you had taken it clean up. So they comb at it, drag at it impatiently, dragging out scores, *starting* scores more, snapping off scores additional. Then the brush. This does little harm if moderately used, and not one of those horrid patent things warranted to mesmerise or what not. Now comes the torture. Tie it up, twist it up, plait it up, bundle it up, crush it up, squeeze it up, screw it, wind it, thump it, drag it, force it down by every unnatural means, till it occupies the least possible space; in fact, get it out of the way, conceal it in corners anywhere, make a mere groundwork and foundation of it to bear the weight of fashion's superstructure. Build up on it great masses of a warm thick substance—pads, horsehair,

Heaven knows what, smelling not exactly nasty, but *close*—through which no air or light could possibly penetrate ; bind over these plaits of false hair, cut from the heads of dirty German peasant women, cut perhaps from the heads of the dead and dying in the foreign lazar-houses and hospitals — a stuff that has been subjected to blasts of hot air in order to do what? *to kill the germs of insect life* that cling to it. They may be dead, these germs, but they are there still, or at least thousands of them were there. These delicate creatures, these sensitive ladies, could not rest in a bed which was reported to contain a single—no matter what ; if they rest in a strange bedroom, no matter how respectable, they must sprinkle it with spirits of camphor as a charm which no insect can pass. Yet they can contentedly bear about with them the whole day long piles of hair to which even now innumerable germs of life may be clinging, to which such germs certainly *did* cling not so very long ago. Having thus most carefully covered over and hidden the original hair, and replaced it by a mere human contrivance ;

having, in fact, put on a wig—yes, an absolute downright wig, the equivalent, if not in shape, in effect, of the disgusting things our grandmothers used to wear ; having done this, they fasten it down with iron nails, with hair-pins artfully disposed and out of sight, but there by dozens. A fashionable lady can easily dispose of three dozen hair-pins—long strong pieces of iron wire on her head, no light weight, these, in themselves. Many of these stick almost in the skin of the head ; others at first only just touch it, but by degrees, by the pressure of the bonnet, they work down till the sharp points dig in, and then each motion of the head sways them to and fro and scrapes the skin till it is most exquisite torture, and it grows red and inflamed. All the while *she* bears a smiling face, and walks erect and proudly. This horrible parody of the Creator's natural covering for the head is put on at a comparatively early hour ; it is kept on never less than twelve hours, often much longer, and never once removed or eased in any way. Now what is the effect of all this ? The hair is a plant, at least

it may be called a plant for the convenience of illustration. Now what do plants want first of all? Why, air and light. These thousands upon thousands of tiny tubes, these delicate organisms called *hair*, thus treated, thus covered, never know what the impact of air or light is from one year's end to another. The next thing a plant wants is room to grow and expand, to put forth tendrils and extend itself. If you covered up a geranium with a door-mat, could you expect it to flourish? If you twisted twenty fuchsias together and tied them with tight bands, and held them down with chafing iron pins, could you expect them to bear blossom, and to charm your visitors with their graceful shape? In one word, the hair is smothered—suffocated. It is like making a man lie in bed for ever, thickly padded down with blankets and mattresses, unable to turn or stretch his legs. What a pale emaciated creature he would be at the end of the year—if he survived so long! And so it is with the hair: it dies by thousands, it comes out by handfuls; then in order to encourage nature, when the young lady



grows alarmed, she carefully sets to work to prevent its renovating power from replacing the dead tubes. This she does by washing it with oils and balms, which is about the same as pouring scalding water on grass with the idea of making it grow. These oils, &c., stop up all the pores of the skin; literally plug them. Suppose a gardener sowed seeds, and then carefully covered the earth over with a layer of plaster-of-Paris. Some ladies' heads are sheer surfaces of raw red skin in consequence of this treatment, this suffocation, this deprivation of air and light, this check to all perspiration, this torture from prodding hairpins. It is at night, when the pads and frissettes and the three dozen hairpins—the half-pound of iron—are removed, that the smart is acknowledged, and 'O, my head is so sore; my head is so hot!' is the order of the hour. How many headaches may be traced to this cause, for which anxious mammas are drenching the poor patient's stomach with pill and powder! When the night does come, and the miserable hair is let free to wander away, and breathe if it can, then what do they do?



Not a few damp the top of the head with a sponge, under the impression that that will make the hair grow. If it does any good at all, it is simply in cooling the inflamed skin; but that effect is gone in five minutes; and it is questionable if the heat of the head drying up the water may not be unhealthy. This is an outline of the Hair Fetish.

Even Ella was not entirely superior to this weakness of the feminine mind, this singular fetish worship. Is it a remnant of the old by-gone ages, when the dwellers on the earth, the primeval men and women, the aborigines, worshipped sticks and stones and odd bits of rubbish, as the natives of Africa, the co-existents with the baboon, do at this day? Has the tradition lingered with the weaker sex longer than with the men? Without a fetish no woman can exist. Yet Ella had no need of any assistance from art; and she knew it well. She knew that she had splendid hair—hair which hundreds of women would have envied her for; yet she buried it, hid it out of sight under her pads and rubbish—under her fetish.

Claudius, walking behind her, raised his stick, and struck the frisette hanging from the brier far away high up out of reach; he kicked another that fell upon the ground into the nettles, while the hairpins went in a shower among the moss. Ella smiled, lifted her hat, and shook her hair about her shoulders, till it surrounded her like a golden cloud.

‘Paint your hair,’ said Claudius; ‘if you can, you will make your fortune, for you will paint sunlight.’

She did not blush at this remark; she did not resent his rude destruction of her materials, but walked on as before. Was this childishness, was it high-bred ease or familiarity? Not the last, certainly, but a mixture of the first two. They were always together, yet never familiar. I use that word in its worst sense. Their ideas were familiar to each other, indeed; their persons, their ways were not. Claudius watched her as she went before him with admiration, unmistakable admiration; but it was calm, cool, critical, as he might look at a picture in the Royal Academy; and she, turning round and

meeting his gaze, did not blush or even smile, but was as calm, as unmoved as he was. She was very lovely. A slender figure, hardly up to the usual height, not *embonpoint* enough for the Venus; slender and graceful, with the gracefulness of a child. Her face was a delicate oval, a low forehead, rather broad at the temples, but not in any way what is called intellectual or high. (How I hate a high, so-called 'intellectual forehead' in woman! It is unnatural, looks strained.) Her brow was smooth as polished marble, without a line, without a wrinkle. The eyebrows were narrow, distinct, and finely arched, the eyes deep blue, fringed with long eyelashes; but these not being black did not show so much as might have been desired. Her nose was straight and delicate; her lips perfectly cut, but rather cold, not full or red enough for passion. Her hands were small, taper, finer than even handsome women's hands usually are, and exquisitely white. They seemed made for the brush and the pencil; true artist hands. She looked more a child than a woman, dressed in that pale-blue silk, with the masses of golden

hair flowing over her shoulders. Yet she was twenty-one. This was the dead Lord Le-strange's pupil and protégée. He was but just dead, yet she was in colours. She owed him everything, but she did not look unhappy; and still with all the colours of her dress, and the smile upon her face, she did not forget him. She was wandering in a Belgian forest with a man, a very young man too, who was neither her husband, her lover, her brother; who was only a friend. But he was *her* friend; and that was a distinction with a difference.

Claudius read while she sketched; it was a book upon architecture, and he did not raise his eyes from the page to watch her as a lover would have done. He grew so absorbed in the mental reconstruction of the ruined temple described that he started when she called to him to come and look at her drawing. Even then he did not come till he had made some notes in his pocket-book and inserted a marker in the page he was reading. Then he went to her, leaned over, and looked long and steadily at the sketch, comparing it with the original—with the gaunt and broken stem be-

fore him. Very politely, but distinctly, in a cool tone of voice, he pointed out a slight defect here and there. In one spot the shadow was too deep, in another the leaf of a plant large in the foreground, though drawn minutely correctly, was turned the wrong way—a way in which nature could never place it. Generally, he said, he found the same fault with it as with all her work; it evinced too much study of detail, too little general appreciation. Ella listened to him in the same calm, almost languid manner. Then she defended herself as logically as if disputing in the Schools. There was no pout upon her lips, no angry spot on her cheek, no disappointment in her countenance, as there would have been had they been lovers. She did not resent the unfavourable criticism; she set to work to controvert it. Details were necessary; how were the inimitable masterpieces of nature—the forests, the hills, the landscapes, even the vast waves of ocean—produced except by the collection of innumerable details, each perfect in itself, and so building up a superb whole?

Claudius objected that the artist had something more to do than to merely copy nature, as it were, word for word. To him the canvas looked flat, and the picture flat as the canvas, unless there was an idea behind the colours. Then the idea carried away the mind, and the paint was paint no longer, but reality. Without the idea the mind saw the paint as paint, and flat; when it received the idea it cast a glamour over it, and the picture lived. Now this idea could never be produced by the most minute attention to detail; it could not be copied from nature; it must come from the artist's own mind, must originate with him, and be transferred, put, as it were, into nature. Landseer's pictures, for instance, were 'paintings,' rude, anything but well painted; but the idea carried away the mind, filled it with glamour, and his pictures lived, even without colour, as was shown by the popularity of engravings from them. This was the magic charm of the marvellous Doré, as distinguished from the stern minute realisation of Holman Hunt. Doré was rude, rough, almost grotesque in his *manner*; he



never worked out the details, but his pictures were instinct with Mind, with Idea, and with Life ; so that the coarse lines, the incomplete outlines, the *hardness* of the sketch passed unheeded, the glamour of the idea entered the soul of the beholder and filled him with the feeling of the artist. This was the true artist; in this power Ella was deficient, or at least she had not cultivated it.

Ella listened to every word and bowed her head once or twice in acquiescence; then silently put up her materials, bound up her hair, and they slowly returned into the city. In the Place Royale they shook hands calmly, as acquaintances would. Ella passed on to the Hôtel de France, Claudius to the Hôtel de Belle Vue, each to their separate *table-d'hôte*. Ella had said in her reply to Pierce that she intended to travel on the Continent, and this was how she commenced it.





## CHAPTER XIII.

THE old coach for Waterloo came 'tootling' and rattling through the Place Royale early on the bright May morning. Ella and Claudius had taken places over night. They were not rich enough to have a carriage to themselves, and to drive through the lovely beech avenues of the forest of Soignies, pausing when they pleased to admire the scenery. Ella had the 250*l.* per annum long since made over to her by her patron; but that was not much to travel on, even when supplemented by the 200*l.* she had realised by her first picture in the Academy, and carefully preserved for this very purpose. Claudius had something more than this. His mother had left him her own fortune, between 300*l.* and 400*l.* per year from land; he had expectations, remote, but large. An entailed estate, held by an uncle, must of necessity fall to him, provided he lived long enough, provided too no heir intervened, for the uncle was seventy-two and infirm. From

this source, at present, he received nothing; for the old man hated the boy as only a narrow-minded old man can hate, and refused so much as to see him. This too was not much to travel on, and Claudius, not so fortunate as Ella or so clever, had not yet been able to supplement his income by the exercise of his profession. Nominally, Claudius was an architect; in truth, he was a sculptor. Hence they endeavoured to practise economy as far as possible; instead of hiring a carriage from the well-known agent in the Montagne de la Cour, and viewing the field of Waterloo in luxurious ease, they were perched up high on the coach top, among the motley assembly who daily traverse the space between Brussels and the famous plain. They rattled on over the hard stony road, stones which no amount of passing wheels can ever wear smooth, with a beech wood on one side and an open country on the other. The beech wood was partly dead or dying, and the gaunt trees looked as if the 'dun hot blast of war' had only blown over them a week ago. Past direction-posts and branching lanes, directing

the traveller to '*ville* Louise' or '*ville*' this and '*ville*' that; through villages where the men stood smoking in blue blouses and wooden shoes at the doors, and where the girls, great grown-up girls, ran after the coach chattering, and tucking their gowns between their knees turned somersaults, to be rewarded by coppers and nickel from the coach-top, flung by grinning boobies, who encouraged the miserable wretches in this sorry exhibition of clumsiness and immodesty. Out again into the broad road and past a dog-cart—a literal dog-cart, drawn by a large, but not very large, dog of a tawny colour, patiently plodding on with a heavy load of potatoes, and his master singing in the rear, totally oblivious of coach and everything else. Ella wanted to sketch the dog-cart, the first that she had seen, but the motion of the coach would not permit her. On again—But why go over the well-known route? A motley group they were on the plain of Waterloo. There was a Russian, a Yankee, two ladies from Australia, a French gentleman, our two English, and a sullen Spaniard. The lion on the top of the monu-

ment spoiled all in Claudius's idea—such a monstrosity had been rarely seen out of a London square. They parted again the same evening at five, to their separate dinners. They met again at eight and visited the Théâtre de la Monnaie, to be first charmed with *Robert le Diable*, and then disgusted with the ballet-dancers among the tombs by moonlight, meant, no doubt, for fairies and spirits, but much too 'leggy.' They parted again at eleven, for their hotels; always meeting and taking leave, just as two friends might; never the faintest show of demonstration—no gentle pressure of the hand, no lingering glance, no half-suppressed sigh—but in the most commonplace manner. Yet they were by no means a commonplace pair, and they were working out a great problem—a problem in which society was deeply interested—all unconscious to themselves.

Henry, Lord Lestrangle, was worse than eccentric, his neighbours said. A man who resided constantly on his own estate, yet never shot or hunted or fished or gave parties, could not be estimable in their idea. As

he neither went to church nor paid the voluntary church-rate, nor subscribed to the voluntary school-rate, nor in any way countenanced parish schemes of relief, of course the clergyman and his two curates were dead against him. They feared he was an infidel; they were deeply concerned. The parson himself, backed by his parishioners, paid the peer a visit. The peer, who was sitting at a late breakfast with a young lady pouring out his coffee, and who did not trouble to rise, asked the parson what he had come for. Says the parson, out of courtesy, good-will, and what not. Says the physician-peer, that he wanted neither courtesy, good-will, nor what not. If the parson came for subscriptions, he might go at once; if he came to play a game at billiards, he might stop. The parson bowed and left in high dudgeon, and described the physician as rude, boorish, an atheist, a gambler, and a man of loose morals; all because he refused to be intruded upon; because he spoke of billiards, and had a young lady at breakfast with him; he, an unmarried man, and no aunt or chaperone in the house.



This young lady was Ella Furnivale. The physician, in his pre-peerage days, had been called in by an old friend at the confinement of his wife. The mother died; the physician only saved the child by the exercise of all his skill and constant attention; then the old friend died, and Lestrangle took the child and bred it up; at first in sheer charity, for there was no money; then out of curiosity to see how it would turn out; lastly, out of love. Not the love of the sexes, not the passion or the sentiment of a man for a woman, but the love of a parent for his daughter. For Lestrangle, who was over sixty and had no children, grew to look upon Ella as his daughter, and had intended to make her his heiress, so far as was in his power. The estate he knew must go to Pierce, but he had a large amount of personal property; this he had intended for Ella, and he had actually during his lifetime settled an annuity on her; but he delayed making his will, as men even of the highest intellectual calibre will delay it, till too late. A strange education Ella had received at his hands. The primary part of it, the very

foundation and groundwork, was a contempt so deep as to amount to positive indifference for the opinions or the remarks of society. She imbibed from him a calm determination to do what she thought fit without the slightest concealment, without the slightest ostentation, let it be never so opposed to the general custom—let it be the greatest sin of all, the sin against conformity. Lestrangle substituted for the judgment of society the judgment of her own soul. He taught her to watch not the tone of other persons' rude and often thoughtless and unmeaning conversation, but to perceive the slightest warning in the delicate balance of her own mind and soul. Of the one she was to take no notice ; of the other she was to be the devoted servant. This man, who repulsed the parson, yet sneered at and reviled the men of modern science—at the great anatomist (no matter what his name) who proved to his own satisfaction that the *thing* (save the mark!) called a soul had no separate existence from the body ; and at the still greater man who discovered that matter was the origin of all things, and God, if there

was a God, was a sort of vapoury mystery, an *ignis fatuus* playing over a vast infinity of bog. For, said Lestrangle, the two greatest discoveries ever made by the mind of man were these: the existence of God and the immortality of the human soul. These two had been discovered by man after ages—ay, thousands upon thousands of years—of the darkness which reigned when the Neanderthal skull was the type of the then race of man. By degrees the conception and finally the definition of a God was arrived at, and also by similar steps the immortality of the soul. These two greatest discoveries they were now trying to disown—*they*, the men of science, who should be engaged in making further inquiries. He hated them all, he resisted them all, he hardly knew which most—the scientific fools *who denied their own existence*, or the so-called ministers of heaven who denied the right of the soul to aspire beyond a certain fixed limit, fixed by their narrow minds and exploded traditions. Lestrangle's great dogma, the faith of the man, was the Human Soul. The body, said he, has been trained since the

world began ; trained to endurance, to labour and fatigue; trained to be useful in a thousand ways; and the result of this training is handed down from generation to generation, till the result is called an instinct. The mind has been at work too for these last six or eight thousand years at all events, a proof of which is that we possess a *written* history for that period. Philosophers have examined into the method of the mind, and we have systems of logic, codes of deduction and synthesis, determinate canons of analysis. But the Soul, the grandest, the highest, the noblest, has never yet received attention. What little attention it has got has been by fits and starts, by spurts, and after each of these it was neglected for another thousand years or so, till another great soul-expounder, called a prophet, made his appearance upon the earth. But these spurts gave no real progress ; only just preserved the soul from relapsing into utter ignorance. For the soul, like the mind and body, was ignorant in itself and required to be taught, and the first step towards that teaching was an analysis of itself. Lestranger,

in fact, wished to found a science of the soul; not a so-called psychological science of mesmeric and magnetic and psychic force, and so forth, but a science of the higher instincts, the higher perceptions and aspirations, which we perceive by the abstract soul. With this view he had shut himself up in retirement to study his own soul. This he had done day by day for forty years, never wearying, ever urged on by increasing pleasure in the pursuit, ever finding greater mysteries, greater beauties. All these he had noted down in his memoranda; carefully written out in a plain handwriting, plainly expressed. A record indeed was this! A forty years' history of the soul! It was only a man living by himself, in silence and solitude, possessed of an immense power of self-concentration, who could accomplish such a work. He shrank from publishing it, as he naturally might, during his lifetime; but he had made arrangements for its issue two years after his decease.

In Ella he had seen early indications of an artistic spirit, of high aspirations, of an ethereal nature, little clogged, if at all, with earthly or



animal passions. He had chosen her to be the living exponent of his faith, and he had trained her up in it from the earliest youth. For this purpose it was necessary that she should be almost constantly with him, and in fact she never attended a girls' school, or had a governess, from the age of twelve. She was always with him, ever listening, ever imbibing. He taught her all; not by books or lessons, but by conversation, down even to the method of interpreting the Assyrian inscriptions; for he was a man of varied learning and boundless reading. But above all things, he showed her how to listen to the promptings of the soul within her; to distinguish between the pseudo soul and the true; to choose between the promptings of passion and even the decisions of the mind, and the still inner voice, the real revelation that came in silence and self-communion. This was her Bible, her Koran, her guide, her judge, her friend, her deathless Mentor. To this she was to listen, this to follow, utterly heedless of all else. It was part of his theory that the excessive cultivation of the mind alone which distinguished



this time was, more than even the cultivation of the body, destructive of the soul. It overlaid the soul with a thick impenetrable armour of logic and conceit ; turned away its attention from itself ; making it deal with the outward instead of the inward, and taught it to seek God in machinery. So that although he told Ella everything, and told her in such a way that the fact and its general scope remained in her memory, yet he did not drill her in geography, or geology, or any of the innumerable sciences. Her science, her study, was to be her own soul. Finding that she had a tendency to interpret herself through the beauties of colour and proportion, he educated her in drawing, and engaged the very first and most expensive assistance in teaching her painting. She had a great natural talent ; and as no pains were spared in developing that talent, she made incalculable progress, and became a recognised and a *paid* artist before Lestrangle's death. He saw that in this painting, in this exercise of the artistic faculty, she would see her own soul reflected ; she would bring it out. And she did so, as

Claudius pointed out; for the detail predominated, that inherent defect of the feminine mind.

There was a time, long years ago, when even Lestrangle, then a young man, had felt a little of that passion which we call love; and it had been for a woman beautiful exceedingly, who, for a time at least, showed a disposition to resign the follies of her class and to cultivate her *real* self. But it was for a time only; she saw Colonel Lovel, and left the mind for the body, or rather for the body's clothing. The handsome military officer far outshone the pale student. She was Claudius Lovel's mother. The Colonel was killed in the Crimea; his widow died of consumption, leaving Lestrangle trustee to her son. Lestrangle took him, brought him up, educated him as he was doing Ella, but in a rather different way. He did not make such a companion of the boy: He threw him out more into the world that he might gather hardness and experience, knowledge of his fellow creatures—for he deemed this needful to a man. Nevertheless he tutored him deeply; trained up the impressionable mind in his own grooves. Clau-

dius, too, showed signs of an artistic nature, but he did not take to painting. He complained that the canvas and the millboard always looked flat to him—instead of standing out, the drawing or the picture appeared flat. He had not that perception of perspective and light and shadow which Ella had. He drew beautifully, but it was only in outline—correct, elegant; but he could not fill-in the shades. His idea of beauty in form was more proportion than colour. So that he admired a superb piece of architecture more than a picture, when harmony reigned; when it was outline solidified, so to say. But his passion was sculpture. This to him was divine. Ella said that the statue, the cold marble, always looked to her dead, the eyeballs vacant, the attitude stiff, the whole thing stone, and nothing more. To Claudius, the harmony of the outline, the proportion, gave it life. He dignified sculpture, worshipped it. Therefore he was taught architecture as a profession; for a man, said Lestrangle, even if removed from want, and in prospect of wealth, should still know some means of gaining his bread; and he

was taught sculpture as a pleasure. He, too, was initiated into the doctrine of the soul; but he too frequently confounded it with the mind, with the highest exercise of the intellect, and looked upon that as inspiration which was really the result of thought. These two, Ella and Claudius, were of late much together at Lestrangle's. They certainly did not look on one another as brother and sister; certainly not either as strangers; least of all as possible lovers. The sentiment of love never entered their minds. Their life at Lestrangle's forbade it, or rather prevented their thoughts dwelling upon such matters. Just as Agassiz

‘Wander'd away, away,  
With Nature, the dear old nurse,  
Who sang to him night and day  
The rhymes of the universe;  
And still as the way grew long,  
Or his spirits began to fail,  
She would sing a more wonderful song,  
Or tell a more wonderful tale,’—

so these two wandered away, with Lestrangle for their guide, into the mysteries of nature, into the realms of human thought, ever seeking, ever finding, till they arrived, by slow degrees, at that almost divine state, the

*ohne hast, ohne rast* of the star doing its God-appointed work in the sky, as their souls were doing their God-appointed work upon the earth.

Long before his death, Lestrangle had marked out for them a course of foreign travel, which they were to accomplish in company, together and yet apart. Ella to study the works of the old masters, Claudius the architecture and sculpture of our teachers in these things, and both to acquire that indescribable taste and tact in art matters which can only thus be obtained. He had taught them too much about the soul for them to mourn his death in the hackneyed way. They left shortly afterwards for the Belgium capital ; they had seen Paris with Lestrangle himself some time since.

They went to Waterloo out of the ineradicable British patriotism (!) ; but they were satiated with that one sight-seeing expedition, and resolved upon no more. Next day Claudius departed to study the Hôtel de Ville and cathedrals within easy reach of Brussels, and Ella entered the picture-galleries.



## CHAPTER XIV.

ULYSSES wearied even of Circe. The great enchantress, the daughter of the sun and friend of the sirens, who could turn men to swine, failed in this one thing, like weaker women. She could not enchant the man who lived always with her. Ay, but this Ulysses was pining for Penelope. Very good, and when he got her, how long did he care for her? Tennyson tells us he waited a year or so, and then sailed away again with his friends far out into the illimitable ocean, commencing a voyage from which he never returned. It was not Penelope, therefore, who acted as the herb 'moly' to counteract the charms of Circe. It was Circe herself. The very flowers sprang up as she walked upon them, ferns bordered her path, fruit hung over her, the warm rays of the sun were softened and subdued and fell in a radiance like a halo round



her form. She walked a goddess, an immortal and divine being, made of no clay, but shaped of Light itself—Light the daughter of the sun—and no man who once saw her could take his gaze from her countenance. The land bloomed perpetually with all the glories of a tropical clime without its overwhelming heat. The ferns grew thirty feet high, shadowing the plain like trees; the mosses were up to the shoulders, great forests of dark green moss—there was a luxuriance, an intensity of growth, a fulness of life. Here Nature put forth her grandest efforts—here in one spot concentrated her beauty and her glory. The bell-shaped flowers hung over the path—deep enormous bells, under which a man could hide from the noontide heat, and look up at an azure dome with pendent lamps of purest white and brightest yellow—the stamens of these wondrous flowers. The breeze shook them, and the pollen snowed upon the earth; the honey dropped from them, and there was an odour as of heaven. And she, who can describe the whiteness of her skin, the magic of her glance, the mellow

tones of her voice, the wave of her exquisite hand? She sings, and lo the very clouds move slowly in the sky, the sun pauses, the trees forget to wave and the wind to blow, the flowers droop, a hazy yellowy mist rises and clothes all things in a slumbrous vapour, blotting out the horizon, smoothing away all angles and outlines, till the earth seems in a dream. And still the voice floats through the air, as a lark warbling from on high, till high heaven grows drowsy with the song. Bronzed with the iron blasts of the stormy wind, beaten hither and thither by raging seas, the victim of misfortunes of every kind, cast out from among men to die in wildernesses—hither Ulysses comes, and sits under the shadow of this mighty lotos-tree. The circling year goes round unnoticed. The Pleiades rise and set, are seen no more, and once again come into view; the starry Orion spans the sky, sinks beneath the wave, and spans it once again. Then he wakes, this man of toils, and longs to leave her whose merest word can make rude earth a Paradise. Not even Circe can enchant the man who is

always with her. The wand is waved in vain, the fatal words are uttered; the wand is but a stick, the magic words but breath, they fall unheeded upon the man armed with the herb 'moly'—that is, with knowledge. The moment that knowledge is attained the Paradise fades away; we are driven forth by flaming swords into an earth of thorns and thistles, there to wander, finding Eden never more.

Georgiana was no Circe. Her long and lovely hair was no magic net, her fine arms no irresistibly divine limbs, her voice no siren tone; yet she was lovely and noble, good and even grand in her own particular way. I do not think she was ever conscious that Neville was weary, that either of them really recognised the fact that they were tired of each other. They laid the blame upon their surroundings. It was better that they should do so. The air of the Continent was not so good as the English; there was a dryness about it, a too great dryness, as if it had been burnt. The fields were brown; they had never that lovely green of the country

at home. The trees were unnatural, they did not grow so large and full; they looked stunted, sleepy. The hotels were miserable; half-carpeted, cold, draughty, unhealthy. In one they were placed on the ground floor; in the next, close to the sky, with the tiles overhead, and the stars visible through the skylight. Nothing was clean; everything oily, even the floors. People were so rude, and even indecent. The famous cookery was a myth; the politeness equally so. The railway travelling was abominable; their trains crept along slow as a caterpillar with a hundred legs, ninety-eight of which are an encumbrance. Even the dresses were a sham, for the women who wore them were horridly dirty. The pictures were no better than those in England by our own native artists, it was only the name of the thing.

The Spas were the most wretched holes on the face of creation—lazar spots where all the bodily infirm and the morally crippled resorted; where the population was composed of miserable invalids, feverish gamblers, cheating landlords, and silly people who thought they

were fashionable. This did not come all at once; the change from pleasure to discontent was slow and imperceptible. The first two months went smoothly, without a check. Each readily gave up little habits to the other. Georgie was by nature an early riser; she invariably rose at seven in her own house, breakfasted, and walked an hour, wet or shine, before study. Neville had for years contracted a habit of remaining in bed till nearly noon, and scarcely ever went out till evening. The moonlight was better than the sunlight, he said, if you were in the country; if in the town, the gaslight threw a glamour over the defects and deficiencies which the glaring sun brought into too great prominence. His true reason was his love of dreaming—of solitary day-dreams. He did not sleep after nine, though his eyes were closed. A vast multitude of images were passing through his mind. By long practice he had arrived at that state when his mental vision could see those ‘images of Epicurus, composed of infinitely small atoms, which are constantly gliding about us like phantoms.’ It was then

that he really lived. This sleep was really a waking existence. It was bad, very bad no doubt, for his mind; it destroyed all sense of reality, so much so that he could hardly understand the sense of what he had written once the pen was laid aside. While he was writing he knew because of the idea in his own mind; let that idea once filter into words, and, although he could recall the idea, he could not gather any sense or meaning from the black scrawl. His existence had in fact become itself an abstract idea, and he could not bear to be awakened from it. If he locked his desk, or any other place which he wished to be particularly secure, he never felt certain that he really had locked it. He would unlock it again to convince himself, then relock it, lift it up to see if the two parts held together, and even then return to it to see that he had left no paper or document out on the table. He seemed to have lost all feeling of matter—matter did not exist; it was all abstract ideas. From these he could not bear to be awakened and brought back to the material world. It jarred upon him; he frowned and



sulked till silence and solitude brought back his invisible world to him again.

From nine till noon every morning was his favourite time for this dreaming. He felt then that he was by himself, totally alone. His room was not in darkness by any means ; he had the curtains open, so that he could see out into the fields or garden. All that he wanted was a field or a garden across which no person walked while he looked out on it. That garden he peopled with beings—whether men and women, or other creatures of his own imagination—each intent on his own ends and purposes, and forming endless combinations. All the while he was perfectly conscious that these images were shadows only, creatures of his own brain ; but he revelled in them just as much, and was as interested in their fate, though he wove their course of destiny himself. He could enjoy nothing with others, let it be sea, or sun, or forest, beauty of any kind. If he stood before a picture, and slowly reconstructed it in his own mind, till he saw, not the rude daub (for the very best of pictures *are* rude daubs), not

the paint or even the colour, but the artist's idea; till he saw the picture the artist had tried to paint—a voice, a word, the presence of another person instantly destroyed the vision, and the canvas became flat and dead, 'painty,' white and black, red and blue. If he stood before a bust of the great Julius till the lines in that wondrous face deepened into a divine anxiety, and the mouth was drawn back with a more than mortal suspense; till the blank eyeballs filled with a liquid orb, piercing into the very heart, seeing through all disguise; till the star on his forehead, the cold marble star, lit itself up and glittered and shone; till this Human Fate came into life—then the sound of a footstep, the lightest laugh, and the whole was gone, and nothing remained but the dusty inanimate blank marble. He reposed upon the grass under the shadow of a tree, till the warmth of the sun filled his veins with a drowsy, slumberous, yet intense *vitality*, while the leaves danced in slow and intricate measure between him and the sky, and the clouds sailed onwards to their havens far away below the horizon.

The grass grew alive around him with countless numbers of tiny living things, barely visible to the eye, yet each with its organs, its senses and sensations, its hopes and fears and griefs, its life, and its hour of bitter death to come. He lost all sense of his own *separate* existence; his soul became merged in the life of the tree, of the grass, of the thousands of insects, finally in the life of the broad earth underneath, till he felt himself as it were a leaf upon the great cedar of existence. Then he lost all sense of joy or pain, of hope or fear, of ambition, of hatred and jealousy, even of love. He was merged in the great soul that binds all things together. It was the Nirvana—the extinction of existence, and yet the entrance into true existence. Time, thought, feeling, sense, were gone, all lost; nothing remained but the mere grand fact, the exquisite delight, the infinite joy of existence only. Then a word, a noise, the sound of his name awoke him. The sunlight lost its glamour, the dancing leaves moved no more in regular rhythm, but helplessly and purposelessly, the clouds became vapour only,

the azure only the result of extreme distance and tenuity ; matter jarred on him again. He was unreasonably peevish at these interruptions. So it was that in those journeys he had taken about the world he had invariably started with Noel, and as invariably parted from him the moment they arrived at the verge of the unknown, where he lay down and dreamt, and the other sprang forward and stripped the desert of its mirage, the forest of its illusion, and the ocean of its infinity. So he had shunned society, dwelling much by himself, reading much, conversing little. Why then had he taken Georgiana to be with him always and ever ? Though he was so fond of the abstract, yet Neville's body, his organs, and his senses were not dead. The life in him loved her as other men love ; the abstract idealism of the man clouded her round about with an atmosphere of hazy splendour. His mind really admired her. He was solitary ; he could find none who understood him, who appreciated him, even who could tolerate him ; certainly none whom *he* could tolerate. He clung to her as

nearest his own being, as of his own order. He invested her with all his dreams; he built about her a palace of his own ideas. Why should he anticipate her habits more than the millions of men who have married before him?

She was in deed and in truth much that he imagined her to be. She was not a lay figure dressed to suit his taste. She was indeed such a statue as his soul could put life into. The beauty and glory with which he had invested her were really and genuinely her due in great measure. He did not marry her to discover afterwards that she was a mistake.

But their habits! Now Georgie was fond of society; not of noise and excitement, but she was sociable in the best sense. She liked to exchange her ideas, to receive new ones, to discuss others. She could not enjoy the finest picture, the noblest sculpture, without some one to speak to, some one to join in her admiration, or at least to dispute it. The abstract did not exist to her as it did to Neville. Her mind was active, but it was

busy with material things, with living beings ; not with the dead, and with the abstract *x* of the imagination. She had a deep fellow-feeling with her friends and with human nature at large—a fellow-feeling in which Neville was almost entirely wanting. He had much more communion with an inanimate tree, with a tiny insect, with the senseless and soulless sun, than with any man or woman. He was not cruel, nor in any way inhumane, but he did not seem to realise that other creatures had feelings. His indifference to suffering had shocked her many times. Georgie was peculiarly *human*, if that word may be used in such a sense. She felt far more than the generality of her sex, who surround themselves too often with dress and affectation till misery and death itself lose their real significance and become mere words alone. To her misery was real, poverty a mighty evil, death a reality, pain a visible and tangible thing. How tenderly she had devoted herself to rouse poor unhappy Heloise ; how many, many times had the poor had occasion to bless her ministrations !



Neville rather shrank from the poor ; not that he disdained them, or that he had any affected notions of '*porcelainity*,' but because they disturbed him ; their rags, their groans, their very *smell* banished the halo which he wished to have always round him. He gladly gave them money, but the direst necessity could not draw him personally to their side. His was the most idealised, etherealised, abstract selfishness that could be imagined ; but selfishness it was nevertheless, and of a character that nothing could ever modify, fixed for the whole term of life.

Georgiana never enjoyed anything alone ; even the assistance she gave to the poor and wretched gave her no pleasure unless she had a companion ; not that she wished her good deeds blazoned afar, but because it was her nature to be ever sociable. She had been weak and womanish enough, with all her mind and penetration, to fondly delude herself into the belief that when she married Neville she should always have an appreciative companion. She believed that she could bring him to find a pleasure in accompanying

her in her missions of relief and kindness. She had the fullest faith that he would be to her an hourly companion. She looked forward to hanging on his arm in those noble cathedrals of the Continent, and listening to the conceptions of his mind—a mind which she revered and almost worshipped—as a disciple might listen to a master, till her soul glowed with *his* inspiration. She looked forward to standing by his side on the glacier and at the edge of the fearful precipice, feeling with him the dread and yet at the same moment the pleasure of the immense and measureless height. With him she should read and study, the same subject and the same book, his hand in hers, their eyes upon the same page. The very soul of this loving and noble woman clung to him. In a month, in two months, in the beginning of the third month, how different from what she had so eagerly longed for! How gladly would she have accommodated her habits to his—foregone her early meal, her early healthy walk, her joy in the sunshine and the fresh air of the morning! Willingly she would have

granted to him hours of lonely study, just as she wished for herself a few minutes at least daily of solitary prayer. But this was not enough. The man grew utterly irritable, discontented, restless. The woman grew thoughtful, unhappy; still tender and loving, but doubting her own power to content him. It was nothing but his long and ineradicable habit of dwelling with himself. He did not love her the less, he would not have parted with her for the world; but he sighed for his old existence, his ancient silence and solitude, his halo of imagination, his communion with the soul of the world. He could not reconstruct the ideal of the painter standing before a picture with Georgie on his arm; he could not enter into the conception of the artist in stone with her beside him in the gloom of the cathedral; the statue remained dead and cold while he felt her touch. The inspiration died in his mind; he felt *matter* always. Then he grew irritable. The more he grew irritable, she—wishing to please him, and divining the cause—left him to himself. With long hours of solitude came back part of the old

dreams and imaginings. The old life reasserted itself, and he clung to it more and more. In the beginning of the third month they had ceased to occupy the same rooms. Georgie rose for her seven-o'clock stroll, but depressed and unhappy. Neville slept till noon; but even through his abstract ideas there ran a thin streak of pain. He was irritated with her for disturbing him, and yet at the same time angry with himself for not appreciating her more than he did. But wisely and lovingly they said nothing of this to each other. They blamed the Continent and its ways. It was in this mood they returned to England very early in June.





## CHAPTER XV.

‘I’LL lay a level hundred they marry outright in ten months,’ said Corney Villiers.

‘I’ll take it,’ said the Duke.

‘Good—is it a bet?’

A nod from the Duke indicated that it was; and down went the record in Villiers’ red memorandum-book.

These two were languidly reposing on one of those double-backed seats at the Royal Academy, in front of one of the pictures of the season.

‘For,’ said Villiers, ‘if you want to see who’s in town, sit here, and they’ll all pass in review in the course of an hour or so.’

So they saw Georgiana Brandon and her husband standing before the said picture, and the bet was the result.

This picture was only a horse’s head—a mere head and neck—just such a design as one sees every day in crayons hung up in

Miss This or Master That's bedroom, framed as a trophy of school talent; a mere tame design, lacking all spirit and soul. But it was the extraordinary finish of detail that gave it its success. The head itself, the ears, the mane, the eye, were all complete, so minutely perfect that the picture seemed to literally live and to stand out from the canvas. Especially the eye; it was looking as full at you as animals ever do look. Save and except for a moment, horse, dog, or cat will not gaze into your eyes. They shrink from it; their eyes turn away, so that you can see the eyeball, but not direct into the mind of the creature, as it were. Why is this? Is it the innate sense of inferiority, of shame, or of a fear, even when most familiar? But so it is; and the artist had faithfully reproduced the peculiar sidelong glance—half at you, half away—of a horse at which persons are intently gazing, so that, as you looked at this picture, the eyeballs, that at first appeared to stare straight into your face, gradually turned away, as the living creature's would have done, and you saw the sheen of reflected light



upon them. A dark deep eye, full of meaning and life—that strangely liquid eye that horses have—brown in itself, and yet with a blue tint in the extreme depth, like a pool in shadow. There was a fly—one of the pests of equine life—gradually crawling with those short quick runs and pauses (you could seem to see it move) towards the eye; it was already on the edge of the lid; in another moment it seemed as if the lids would twitch in the attempt to throw off the tormentor. In the corner of the eye there was a liquid drop, a tear. Sylvia Vane declared it made her want to wipe it away with her handkerchief. But perhaps the most wonderful part was the hairs; they were so minutely painted that each hair was perfect in itself. The neck was no blotch of brown colour; it was composed of innumerable hairs, each perfectly painted—a marvellous effort of skill and that eternal patience which an apostle of art called genius. There was no action in this head, its *pose* was languid, its outline languid; its execution made it live, and people—especially the ladies, whose instincts the completion of

detail appealed to—crowded about it as the sensation of the season. The picture was signed in one corner ‘Ella.’

It was at this Georgie and Neville stayed to gaze. There Neville left her; and Georgie, a trifle tired with pacing the long galleries, sat down side by side with the Duke and Villiers, who knew her story, but not herself personally.

Neville wandered away in a dawdling listless manner, looking more at the crowd than at the walls, for he knew that it was in vain for him to attempt to enter into the spirit of the artists in his own peculiar way in the midst of that rustling assembly.

Georgie had sat there half an hour, now dwelling on the horse’s head, now examining her catalogue, now the dresses of those who swept about her—for Georgie, with all her strength of mind, was not proof against a bonnet ;

‘ No woman’s eye, however large her head,  
Can pass a bonnet or a feather-bed.’ *Pseudo Pope.*

Lady Clanbarris pounced on her while she was absorbed in a fascinating polonaise. A

tall Scotch peeress, angular in the cheek-bone, angular in her own will, but dressed to—perfection. There was much hand-shaking and inquiry, and why ever had not Georgie called on her?

Georgie hesitated; said they had only returned four days, and—and (she blushed ever so slightly) the circumstances were singular.

‘O, nonsense!’ cried her ladyship, loud enough to be heard across the room. ‘We all honour your courage, are all proud of you. Where is *he*?’ By which she meant Neville.

‘O, look, mamma,’ cried Sylvia Vane, who was a rather gushing girl of seventeen; ‘there’s that extraordinary Georgie Knoyle, I do declare! O, do come! We *used* to know her, Cecilia. O, do, mamma, let us *see* her; let *me*; I *must*!’

‘Hush!’ whispered the Hon. Mrs. Vane; ‘she’ll hear. I do not approve of such people.’

‘But I take an interest in them,’ said Cecilia, in a calm cool tone (as much as to say, ‘My will is law’), as she took a step towards the obnoxious person. Cecilia was a belle, if not *the* belle of the hour; a tall fine girl of nineteen,

cool as high-pressure education, both school and social, could make her, with a fortune of 80,000*l.*, and heiress to a title. She had been thoroughly well 'put up.' If a boy is left heir to a dukedom and 30,000*l.* a year, as a matter of course his trustees teach him the extreme value of money by making a lawyer of him. This girl—for girl she was in years—thoroughly understood her position. She knew her chaperone, the Hon. Mrs. Vane, with this portionless, or nearly so, daughter to marry, could not dispense with her services. All the men, you see, who fluttered round the heiress could not marry her; ten chances to one but somebody out of the lot would be smitten with a Vane. So the cool Cecilia calmly stepped up to the unconscious Georgie, and the Hon. Mrs. Vane had to make the best of it, at the same time frowning sideways at Sylvia.

'You need not frown at me, mamma,' said that pert young lady, thereby heating the maternal wrath to boiling-point.

A moment afterwards Mrs. Vane's softest tones were introducing the heiress to that 'creature.' The heiress had hardly spoken to

Georgie when the Duke and Villiers, who were sitting at the other side of the seat, came round, shook hands with Cecilia, and were introduced likewise. Then there ensued a smart colloquy.

‘I think,’ said Cecilia, in her cool deliberate tones, ‘that you deserve a medal of the very best gold, and that you ought to be made a viscountess. I wish I had such a mind and *such* courage.’

‘Mrs. Brandon—no, I mean Knoyle—I mean Brandon—I—I—’ the Duke actually blushed and stammered. He did not know what to call her.

‘Mrs. Brandon,’ said Georgie, ‘if you please.’

‘Mrs. Brandon,’ said the Duke, annoyed with his own want of tact, ‘I have wished to make your acquaintance for months. I was never so interested in a thing in my life. Howard—that’s my brother, he is in the House—spoke of it for two hours; made a capital speech,’pon my honour; ought to be the duke, did Howard—man of talent—astonishing clever—you must know him. By the bye, we give a garden party at our place by the Thames

next week; the Duchess would be delighted; told me specially to look out for you.'

Georgie had by this time recovered her self-possession. For a moment she shrank from the position which her singular marriage had placed her in, and hesitated. Then she cast a glance at the Hon. Mrs. Vane, and saw that woman's face working with mortified rage, and in an instant she determined to accept.

Villiers and the Duke took them through the whole range of the rooms. People saw this, and Georgiana in one short hour became the fashion.

'She's a fine woman, by Jove,' said the Duke to Villiers as they parted at last, and the two drove off to Lord's Ground. 'A contrast to our puny girls. Look at her waist! Now I hate a waist you could put a bracelet round; it's unnatural; it's absurd.'

For an hour or so Neville was proud of her at the garden party by the Thames. Society gathered round her like wasps round a ripe plum. Rank, title, wealth vied to exchange a word with her—she was not left a moment to herself. They would have killed her with ices,



drowned her in wine and cooling drinks; and she bore it all so queenly, so calmly, with such superb and natural grace, as if she had been born to it, and it was her due. Truth to say there was a little feminine triumph in her heart, as how indeed could it be otherwise? She remembered the spiteful things that had been written and said of her by these very persons—those fellow-labourers in the cause—from whom she had expected the heartiest co-operation. They had had this effect—they had made her feel isolated, lowered in her own esteem, let it be ever so slightly. Now the tide had turned, now she was above them, they would cower at her feet and cringe to her; and why? Because fashion was with her. How she detested and despised the whole band of weak and fickle creatures, who had the impudence to call themselves the equals of men; who even hinted at their apostleship! Her beauty had not a little to do with her success. It was not a drawing-room beauty; it was a beauty naturally associated with boldness, resolution, with Athene, the blue-eyed maid of Homer. There was something Homeric in her *pose*—something

grand and even heroic in the style of her very walk, in her very simplicity and straightforwardness. The men especially crowded about her. They admired her upright walk; her total abstention from the *minauderie* of the day; the freedom of her movements; her ease and grace. It so chanced that just then Gladstone and the *Contemporary* had managed to draw a passing attention to Homer in the fashionable throng; so the fellows dubbed her La Athene—she was so called even in the *Morning Post* and *John Bull*—that strange mixture of religion and dress, and, despite the odd mixture, one of the best papers of the day. With the women her success was more partial but more decided: they split into two factions. The younger girls took her part—those that were marriageable, lively, and full of hopes. So did the married ones—those whose hopes were crowned with fruition, who were settled. But the widows and the elder daughters hated her with a venom peculiarly their own, and assisted the clerical party to throw the *odium theologicum* on her. This very fact brought up a fresh reinforcement to her assistance. All

the socialists and reformers, all the atheists, secret or pronounced, especially the secret ones, whose number in our day is legion, rushed to her side, and made a battle-cry of her. Headed by Howard, the Duke's brother, who, as the younger son of a peer, and consequently shut out from the title, was a rabid republican, they went dash into Parliament, and put a bill upon the orders of motion for next session legalising such a method of marriage. Just then came on the annual discussion over the deceased wife's sister, and Howard and his friends contrived easily to introduce the whole question of marriage. The solid ranks of respectability, the villa people especially, were alarmed to their very centre. The pulpits rang with denunciation; the press teemed with animadversions on either side. The more the villa people cried out against her, the more the titled people upheld her, for there is an instinctive aversion between the two classes. These nameless respectabilities who dwell in villas, dotted by thousands round London, in Kent, Surrey, and such home counties, have taken a prominent part lately in the affairs of the nation. They

have grown conscious of their power and of their numbers. They possess a command of money in many cases far superior to that of the pure aristocracy, and their money is immediately available. It is not locked up in land, requiring months, and even years, to realise it if wanted. A man may be worth half a million in land and yet want a thousand. Cash is not so readily lent on that security as some people imagine. There is always a suspicion of mortgage about it; and if it is entailed, and the owner cannot sell, what security has the lender that his capital will ever return? Even when an estate is sold the process is tedious in the extreme. But these villa folk have their capital at their fingers' ends; in shares, stocks, consols, debentures, or at worst, in manufactures, ships, merchandise. They can get the command of immense sums at a day's notice, because their affairs are well known, and their means of repayment estimated to a sovereign. Into any movement, therefore, they can throw a monetary weight and influence unsurpassed by that of any class in the kingdom. In addition, they have the power that the employment

of thousands of artisans gives in these times. A landed proprietor may have five or six thousand persons living on his estate, of whom his tenants-in-chief, his farmers, tradesmen, and so on, may number from two to even three hundred; but such estates as these are few, and besides they have this weakness, they cannot carry the rank and file with them, even if the rank and file be willing. The rank and file either have no votes, or if they have, and even if they actually do 'go right,' yet they throw no *verve*, none of that 'cry' into it, which is above all things necessary in a time when 'cry' is everything. But the artisans of London have votes by the thousand, and they register them all. They are more or less educated men—they read the papers, they discuss politics, they enter into the religious questions of the day. Nine out of ten follow the lead of their employers—not from direct compulsion, but from indirect influence. For these employers, though strict and even 'finical' to a fault, spare no pains and no expense for the comfort and well-being of their men. If a man is sick there is wine, medicine, rest—even in



some cases the seaside; if he dies his widow is looked after. His wages are punctually paid; he receives an annual rise. Then there is the religious organisation, chiefly evangelical, which issues books, pamphlets, tracts by the million, and some of these at least take root, and act like a bearing-rein upon the masses. So it is that these merchants and manufacturers, these printers and sugar people and silk people and draper people, and so forth, who spend their days in town, and go out in the evening to their villa ten, twenty, thirty miles from the metropolis, possess a power and an influence almost irresistible. And between them and the aristocrats of birth and landed possessions there exists the bitterest antagonism; far bitterer than ever existed between the aristocrat and the proletarian. Indeed the patrician of our time has almost come to hob-nob with the proletarian, and it is the villa class who exhibit hostility to mob-rule. These villa people, chiefly evangelical or nonconformist, raged with boiling hatred against the innovation made by Georgie and Neville; therefore the patricians sided with them more and more, till



their days became a round of fashionable amusement, till they had more invitations than they could possibly have disposed of in half a dozen years. And Georgie? The woman was strong enough in her to make her throw herself into the vortex with a delight all the more intense that she had hitherto lived quietly out of the charmed circle. And Neville? He watched her at first with satisfaction; then he grew restless; then he too yielded to the fascination of excitement.

With a species of abstract astonishment he found himself on the stand at Ascot with the Duke and Villiers, betting—not heavily, but enough to make the game exciting—on the dark favourite, of whom Villiers' agents had given the best account. He, the abstract idealist, the transcendentalist, was intent upon the charge of the 'light brigade' to success or failure.

Georgiana was with the Duchess and her daughter at Madame Louise's. Such exquisite bonnets! This was how the firm of Knoyle and Brandon were engaged in June 187—.



## CHAPTER XVI.

CLAUDIUS did not admire the famous stained-glass window in St. Gudule. There was an exquisite finish, a delicate colouring, a noble proportion about it; but it lacked the one essential feature. Gaze at it as long as you might, you never saw the mind of the artist rise up before you. It was a picture—nothing more—not a thought. He had a memory of another window far away, on the edge of an English county, buried in the obscurity of a wretched little town, or rather village, out of the track of tourists or seekers after art. This window fell flat on the eye at first. Taught to expect a sudden surprise by the gossip of the country-side, as the traveller approaches it the eye wanders over it disappointed, dulled, and deadened. But by and by, with silence and with steady gazing on this window, the grotesque legends grow into a grim life, and the figures move and shriek and

writhe in agony in that horrible hell. A vast mass of colour in purple, blue, and yellow—the great daubs of blue resolve themselves into demons thus represented of the most intense flame. For the hottest fire is blue—look at a candle, look at the jet of gas, there is a blue spot, an azure circle; therefore has the artist made his demons purplish and blue, whose very approach shrivels up the damned. And where is HE—the dweller in the pit? See, he is at the bottom, as if supporting the whole diabolical scene upon his shoulders, the Atlas of Hades. Here is an awful toad; here and there grow flowers—yes, absolutely yellow and blue flowers—the lilies of the valley of the shadow of death. Gaze at it, and gradually the rudeness, the utter want of cohesion in the picture, the contempt of all perspective, fade away out of sight, and it becomes a breathing reality, breathing fire and torture and misery indescribable. The mind of the artist, his ideas, stand out before you, fasten on and fascinate you, and form a picture on your mind which time cannot efface. To Claudius this was genius; and the window at St. Gudule, with all its

delicate proportion, its exquisite colour, was tame and flat—a mere drawing-room sketch in copybook handwriting, like the flourishes on the first page of the ciphering-book—clever penmanship, but meaning nothing. The unknown artist who wrote his signature in these marvellous pictures upon the windows in the obscure Gloucestershire village had a meaning, and has left it plain to all who choose to see it. He was the Doré of those days; and in our time what would be Dante to us without Doré to give form and shape to the ideas of the poet?

Ella listened to the music of his lips that lovely day in June as they stood in the gloom of the vast old cathedral. Her mind was wrapped up in his words, her cheek glowed a little, her mouth slightly open, her eyes glistened; to this girl art was life itself, and Claudius was art in human shape.

What were those gods and goddesses who walked upon the earth in the olden time, who came down all glory and majesty, yet subdued, that man might not be afraid, who filled the very air with their sweetness and their beauty? Were they not art in its true shape, visible

divinity, the essence of all loveliness? Was there no danger of Ella loving him, and loving him too deeply for her own peace of mind? The woman of the world must sneer at this pair, and believe them utter myths, impossibilities. With such opportunities mischief *must* have ensued. But mischief did not ensue. For remember Ella had not been bred up as the daughters of men are usually bred, tutored from morning to night in the knowledge of evil. Here is a scoffer and a liar, a traducer of mothers and aunts, a slanderer of academies and seminaries! Shriek at him—down with him! True it is that the very word of evil, the very existence of it, is politely ignored—there is no such thing. A careful mamma once attacked a certain novelist, abusing him for mentioning a certain class of women in his books; her child should not read them, she had never heard of such creatures, and had no idea that such could live. ‘Then, madam,’ replied the novelist, ‘she has never read her Bible.’ And the mamma, overcome, retreated under cover of ‘sacrilege and profanation,’ and such similar cries. ‘She



thinketh no evil;' such should be the words which our parents ought to be able to truthfully say of their children. Why then teach them so incessantly to be on their guard against the scandal of society, the wickedness of the men, the deceit of the world, the value of money, till the girl thinks of nothing else but evil; not with the idea of following it, but for the purpose of avoiding it? How can her mind be pure if she is taught day and night the wiles of deceit, in order that she may avoid them? Till in the end it comes to this: we all, one and all, little and great, agree in this one thing only—to mistrust each other, to disbelieve in the existence of purity unless accompanied by its outward signs, *i.e.* the ring upon the finger. We have totally forgotten the *Honi soit qui mal y pense* of our royal arms.

Did she love him? I cannot answer that question. Certainly no word of love had ever passed between them. He had never pressed her hand; their lips had never met. Day by day for hours and hours together, yet never had there been a mutual flash of the eyes; never the slightest familiarity. Art threw her



holy mantle over them—her children, and they walked as in the first garden of man, unconscious of their nakedness. For, morally speaking, they were naked in the eyes of the world, wandering about shamelessly together, travelling in company, and no ring, no blood tie even, no chaperone, not even a servant.

Those who have done the world most harm are those who preach perpetually day and night of the infinite wickedness, of the inalienable streak of evil in our nature. Granted that in theological argument such may be the case; even then how much better to keep it out of sight! Let us veneer it over and hide it, till mayhap, in the time to come, it may be partially eradicated. We may be as fierce now as savages in our hearts, as bloodthirsty, as revengeful; but how rarely we seek gratification in bodily violence! That natural instinct has been veneered over—glossed over by long processes of civilisation; and we walk about in safety unalarmed, even if our known enemy dwells next door. Why should it be preached day and night that man and woman cannot live in each other's daily company

without sin? It may be now, and it may be that to the end of time, the animal passions may endure; but is that any reason, any more than in the case of the enmity, that bodily evil shall follow? If the mind and the long processes of civilisation can efface the resort to material violence, why can they not also efface this other mischief? Why should we be for ever divided into two great armies, each resting in its separate camp, protected by truce, but ever distrustful—afraid to wander away a mile from the watchfires, or out of call of the sentinels, lest hovering horsemen should sweep away the stragglers? Where is the mind, the march of intellect, the genuine progress of our day, if two creatures made in God's own image, educated with all the knowledge of the ages past, and inspired with all the hopes of the ages to come, cannot pass to and fro on the earth together without falling into sin? Why should even the thought of evil occur to them?

The thought of evil did not occur to Ella, neither did it to Claudius. Their days they spent together; often their evenings also. They

breakfasted and dined apart, and lived in different hotels. They visited the famous spots of the world, and stood before the human revelations of the times gone by in reverent awe and wonder. For these, Venus de' Medicis, Apollo Belvidere, Laocoon, and Antinous, are they not revelations of the human mind—prophecies of what is to come to pass? The patriarchs and the prophets told us truths of the soul, truths which grow year by year and spread over the earth, and lead slowly onward to the emancipation of humanity from the iron bands of ignorance, superstition, and cruelty. Those great sculptors were the prophets of the body, the apostles of matter; and their prophecies are perhaps even farther off from fulfilment than those of the prophets of the soul. When shall we see men shaped as Antinous, women as the Venus? We have seen both men and women not perfect, but lovely exceedingly in the beauty of their lives. The day may yet come when we shall see them perfect in their bodily frames. For there shall be a new earth and an incorruptible body. Is not perfection

incorruptible? do not these statues shadow forth human perfection? And Art, under whose shadowing mantle these two children walked, is daily teaching and preaching, telling the multitude to eschew the ugly and the disproportioned, just as the moral preachers tell it to eschew the morally ugly or evil. While we pursue the beautiful, so long as our souls are wrapped up in the contemplation of loveliness, so long is it impossible for us to commit sin. Therefore the artist builds about him a temple, and carries it with him as he walks.

She *did* love him. But marriage—the thought of being joined together for ever by the ceremonies of the Church—never entered into her heart. Sooth to say she had no idea of a time in which she should be apart from him. Therefore she went calmly on, never looking back, never attempting to anticipate the future, happy in the hour. He had not only taken the dead peer's place—he was not only to her patron, father, brother, family and all, but he had taken a place the peer had never occupied. She had no more idea of ever parting from him than from the sun, the

air, and the sky. Nothing could part them but death. Of death I am afraid she never thought. To these artists, these pagans, who live on beauty, who worship it and deify it, and pursue it day by day, I fear the thought of death, of the judgment beyond the grave, never comes, unless indeed to some poor unfortunate drink-sodden, outcast Bohemian. Never to the prosperous, who dwell in the sunshine perpetually. They cannot conceive the non-existence of matter — that is the psychological reason. They have no idea of the non-existence of beauty.

‘A thing of beauty is a joy for ever;’

they shall never part from it. Their life is the life of the soul, and the soul feels itself immortal; the thought of dissolution, of an outer darkness, cannot enter into it. Change there may be; but change is a pleasure, a variety from one landscape to another, from one garden to a distinct successor.

She did not know that she loved him. Her heart did not beat quicker at his approach; her pulse was regular, her cheeks pale, her eyes met his fully, and without hesitation.

Her fingers did not linger in his, asking for a pressure. Her love was in this—she had no idea of parting from him; and in this—the intense enjoyment she felt in her art, working with him.

Claudius never questioned himself. In truth he loved her, but the consciousness of it never occurred to him. How should it to either of them? They had been so constantly in each other's society at Lestrange's that the thought of anything unusual, of any peculiarity in the connection between them, never occurred to them. Yet they did not look on each other as brother and sister.

The world is sneering again. Could such a model young man as this exist, to ramble about with a handsome, or at least good-looking, girl, to be in love with her, and yet to refrain from the slightest familiarity? But he had not got to refrain; the impulse did not seize him. Claudius was a gentleman. He was no wild Bohemian in a velvet dress and smoking-cap, a mere man of meerschaum, smelling always of smoke and paint; he was not the traditional artist wanderer, the dis-



grace to art and to humanity. His dress was the outward token of his character, quiet, subdued even to a fault, even here on the Continent, where so much license in these matters is allowed.

They wandered on from Brussels to Cologne, thence to Dresden, afterwards to Prague, and meant to visit Vienna, still living in the same manner—together and yet apart. But at Prague they saw English newspapers, in which Ella's horse's head was loudly applauded, and the crowds around it mentioned. Claudius at once decided that they had better return if the picture was so famous and so popular; buyers would be sure to turn up, and Ella ought to be on the spot to secure the largest price. They returned to London, and here again followed the same plan—Ella was accommodated at a private hotel near Euston; Cladius took apartments in Russell-square. The apartments were cheaper than hotel life; he could thus contribute more to her expenses, and be satisfied that so far as *menu* was concerned she did not suffer much. They went day after day to the Academy; they

wandered about the room, and had the intense satisfaction of seeing scores of people stopping before Ella's marvellous piece of detail. Timidly she called Claudius's attention to the fact that his theory was not shared in by all persons; here was a work in which detail was all, and yet see—and she nodded with a glow of natural pride in the direction of the head. Claudius granted that if success was a proof she was right, but he still remained firmly fixed in his own belief that the idea was all in all in a painting. Discussing thus they had drawn nearer to the spot where it was hung, and thus overheard the criticisms of a party of friends. It was Georgiana, the Duchess her inseparable companion, Cecilia, and Mrs. Vane, who had brought with them Noel Brandon, who was in London, to see this famous picture which Royalty itself had paused to gaze on. No sooner had Noel glanced at it than he exclaimed, 'My horse, my horse!' in tones that drew all eyes upon him. They questioned him, and he said that it irresistibly reminded him of his favourite animal which had dashed with him over the cliff.

‘Who is the artist? I will give anything for this,’ cried Noel in excitement.

‘I painted it,’ said Ella very faintly.

Together they had drawn up close to the group. These details need not detain us. After a few days Noel bought the head for a thousand guineas, and Ella became the friend of Georgiana Brandon. Inquiring into her friends and relations, Georgiana found out the truth which Ella stated without the slightest reserve. Georgiana become full of interest. She tried to introduce Ella into the whirling circle of fashion in which her days were passed, but society would not have it.

The Hon. Mrs. Vane hit the mark for once at least. ‘You, my dear,’ said she, addressing Georgiana in her most dulcet tones, ‘you have at least gone through some form of marriage; but these two are wandering—well, I will not say vagabonds—without a tie upon each other.’

Neither would Ella have it. She shrank even from the glitter and bustle of those few private friends to whom Georgie brought her. She wished to be alone with Claudius. The

very glimpse she caught of this life—this incessant whirl and crush—sent her back shivering, afraid lest ever it should be her lot to dwell thus in restlessness. Then came the dread, for the first time in her life, that Claudius might be drawn into the vortex and separated from her. It was the first time that the idea had occurred to her—it frightened her; she used her gentle influence to draw him away. He was nothing loth. Something of the same kind had passed through his mind. No course could be so happy as theirs—no life so entirely joyful, so peacefully delicious. Promising to keep up a correspondence with Georgie, Ella left by herself, and rejoined Claudius in Paris, whither he had preceded her a few days. Finding they were there, Georgiana wrote to Horton, and he called upon them.

To Georgiana the spectacle of these two was doubly interesting: first, because in some degree it recalled her own experiment; but chiefly because of the gnawing worm in her heart—the consciousness that Neville had tired of her society since their marriage—

only since they had become one. But these two never tired of each other. All the romance of love clung to them, shorn of its stormy passions, shorn of the dulness, the heaviness, the indifference which is, or seems to be, the inevitable result of marriage, if indeed nothing worse occurs. Being naturally of a logical turn, and in long habit of reducing her ideas to writing, Georgie found time, even in the incessant business of visiting and pleasure, to draw up a scheme for the regulation of such wanderers as these. They should be, she wrote, persons of highly educated mind, polished and high-bred, trained in the traditions of politeness. They should have some object in view—some real study or work. Each should possess some means, and these means should be either nearly equal, or the one that possessed the larger share should consent to forego that advantage, and be content to live in a style suited to the slenderer income of the other; so that in fact there might be perfect equality and perfect independence. To some extent, the route to be followed should be laid down before starting.



Perhaps it would be better if the parties were not too great friends, or too closely connected—rather advantageous that they should be introduced to each other by the medium of advertisement, as travelling companions are now. All these details the experience of society could work out. To her mind there was nothing absurd or in any way difficult for a rational man and a rational woman to walk together through the world, pursuing a mutual object, lending each other mutual assistance, cheering each other by company, and perhaps even preserving each other from ignoble pursuits by that very companionship. The grand beauty of it was that this plan possessed that romance, that delicate appreciation of each other, which marriage—even the partial engagement of her own—evidently destroyed. She wrote very earnestly to Horton about them.

And Noel was in London.





## CHAPTER XVII.

HELOISE had no peace; Noel had destroyed it. She could have lingered about the fields and woods, wandering with him in a dream of pleasure for ever and ever, had he not asked her to fly with him. Disguised as it might be under the softest and most specious guise, the proposal, though barely more than hinted at, went full to her heart in all its naked evil. It awoke her from her dream—it dispelled the pleasure—the fields and woods smiled no more; for it brought to her mind the consciousness of guilt. She had never, as it were, seen herself before. This proposal put a mirror before her, and she saw the crime of which she had been guilty, and the still more tremendous crime upon whose edge she had trembled. In the silence and solitude of her own chamber hot burning blushes suffused her cheeks. She felt the embraces Noel had

showered upon her in that lonely nook—they clung to her, and she could not shake them off, miserable as she was with shame. Yet underneath those very blushes, that very shame, her heart beat faster and faster. An idea had been planted in her which grew and flourished and bid fair to occupy her whole soul—an idea which, guilty and wretched as it was, promised her the most exquisite happiness. Till by degrees the wild desire to fly—to rush away with him, even into outer darkness—rose to an almost irrepressible strength; and as she sat by her open window, watching the shadows stealing over the downs, her feet longed to be away—away over the hills. She could have almost started up and run off by herself. The poor child was shaken with passion. She would fling herself upon her bed, and clutch the pillow with hysterical excitement, and then burst into a silent fit of weeping till it seemed as if her very heart would break. She paced up and down her room till her head was giddy, then she sat by the window and watched for him. She had given out that she was unwell, that she had a head-

ache, and so on. She could not show herself; she must be alone—alone with him. For he was with her, even here in the solitude of her chamber. The great sun was blotted out from the sky—the sky itself had vanished—the down was a chaos; she saw nothing but Noel, felt nothing but his burning kiss, the fierce pressure of his arms. That long night through she never rested, never slept; she did not toss, she was calmer now. She lay thinking, thinking, thinking, and still it was Noel. Till towards the morning, when the dawn was breaking, her eyes closed involuntarily. Near noon she awoke refreshed and strengthened, but the first thought was Noel. But with the new strength and the rest there had returned to her some little dignity of mind, the waters of passion had subsided sufficiently to allow her reason to raise its faint cold voice. She must avoid him. It was her duty to do so, not only for herself, but for him. Yes, for his sake. That was the burden of her thought the whole day long. For his sake. Not for her own; but for his. This seemed to strengthen her, to cast aside

temptation. Strange that she should dwell upon his salvation, not her own. The truth was, though she would not have owned it to herself, that she did not wish to be saved. For her own sake was of no avail; she dared not trust to that—it was too feeble, too weak an inducement; therefore she reiterated ‘For his sake—for his sake!’ She must avoid him; she had helped to save his life, she must save his soul now. And all the while her fingers trembled, her knees would not support her weight in that firm unyielding manner of old; they shook, she could not walk with her old elasticity of step. Her hands were constantly ready to outstretch themselves, to save her from falling. She was obliged to hold to the banisters as she descended the broad staircase with its easy descent. How should she avoid him? She could go on a visit, and so escape the torture of his daily call. She almost made up her mind to do this; but somehow there seemed so many obstacles. First, she had been at home so long, there was a natural reluctance to leave the old place. She had never made many female friends.

She had aunts, but they had shaken their heads at the education Pierce gave his child, and whenever she met them, lectured her on her ridings, her walks, her scampering excursions, her fishing, and her boating. They were detestable creatures, and since—no matter ; no, she *could* not go to them.

But Georgiana was in London. Georgiana would be glad to see her. But she was too unwell for so long a journey—the weather was so warm—there had been such dreadful railway accidents, and Georgie herself was so good and grand, it would make her feel so small. These were the reasons why she did not leave Bourne Manor.

Heloise, unhappy girl, was hard at work deceiving herself. She clung to the spot ; her heart was there, and her body could not move away from it. She must avoid him at home. How to do that ? At least she could plead that she was indisposed, and so escape walking out with him alone. She must see him in the house ; that could not be avoided, without absolute rudeness. Was there not danger in that—danger to him ? No. Noel would

see that she was right—he would even come in time to bless her for her firmness. And herself? What danger could there be in the house? She could never, never *start* with him from the house, with Pierce within call; her cheeks burnt at the thought. No, she was quite safe here. It was better too to face the temptation—to conquer it—to get accustomed to it, till it had no power. And then Noel; she must gently persuade him out of his infatuation. So for a whole week Heloise remained within doors; steadfastly refusing Noel's hints, his praise of the weather, his suggestions of pleasant excursions, resisting even when unconscious Pierce begged her to go out. She plumed herself on this strength of resolution. After all she was not so very weak, not so very guilty. It was fortunate that she had not gone for a visit. Then perhaps she should have been always thinking of him, always longing to be back home and near him; as it was, she saw him daily, and no harm ensued. Her heart grew calmer, more peaceful. There was no danger; she was not afraid now. Perhaps in time, when Noel was



cured of his frenzied excitement, when she had persuaded him out of his infatuation, when she had saved him from himself, perhaps then the old happy times might come back, when they should again wander over 'forest, field, and fell,' seeking for flowers for Pierce's garden, discoursing of nature, when this fever-fit should be past, and all again be placid. Heloise dreamed of joyful times to come. She was very gentle now; singularly affectionate to Pierce—gentle exceedingly to the servants, thoughtful of their little wants, of their relations, their private cares. She was loving to all around her, except Noel; at least the *except* was her own idea. She remembered her poor pensioners—unthought of now for many a day—and began to visit them again, carrying with her food and wine and money, and a glow of sunlight into the wretched cottages of the poor. But always alone—always when she knew Noel was absent, and when he would not overtake her.

Noel was mad at this time—literally and genuinely mad. His face was smooth, his demeanour calm and gentlemanly, his voice

had its usual tone. But the man's heart was boiling with wildest passion, with fierce and frenzied rage, working and seething like the veritable witches' caldron. Mingling with the savageness of his love there came a growing feeling against Heloise—against her in this way. She had led him on—encouraged him—allowed him to proceed; then, just at the last moment, when her own safety was concerned, she turned away from him. O, yes, her own safety—her own good name; these women were so utterly selfish, they could love deeply, passionately, up to *that*, but no further; pah! he hated them. Had she really loved him, had those kisses she had showered upon him been real, she would have clung to him—begged him to take her. She was not a coquette—she was worse. She loved artificially—she could put a bound and fence to her passion; rail it off, as one might a garden. He despised her; he sneered at her; he hated her. He used this very contempt, this very hatred and rage, as a justification of his own wicked and evil thoughts. Verily at that time, if he could have caught hold of her alone, he

would have attempted to drag her away by sheer physical force. And he did watch for such an opportunity, but Heloise remained indoors. Finding that he could not tempt her forth, he tried fraud: he gave out that he should be away for a day; then he mounted his horse, and hovered about within easy reach of the house, feeling sure that Heloise would come out; and he determined to snatch her up in the saddle before him, and to ride away with her. He even went so far as to telegraph to his yacht to anchor in the road at the mouth of the river—the river which ran at the end of Pierce's garden. The man was literally mad. But Heloise did not venture forth all that week. Then he raged against her inwardly still more, though outwardly polite and attentive when they met—always in Pierce's presence—but with a demon in his heart, boiling to wreak his vengeance on the fragile creature whom his hand could crush as it might a delicate rose. By the end of the week his frenzy had so far subsided that he gave up the idea of carrying her off by force. He would resort to fraud—to

the same arts with which she had decoyed him onward; he would deceive her with a show of penitence, with a semblance of regret for his wicked attempt; then when she was once in his hands, he would lead her on—he would fascinate her as he had done in that shady nook, till she reposed in his embraces unresistingly. It was about this time that Heloise recommenced visiting her poor pensioners, and Noel at once seized the opportunity.

One afternoon Pierce suggested that she should visit Betsy Farmer, the bedridden old lady at Wick. ‘At Wick?’ said Noel; ‘that is down the river, is it not? Will you allow me to row you down?’ He said this in a deprecating tone of voice. Heloise, little versed in the arts of deception, strong too in her new-found armour against temptation, readily accepted the proposal; and in an hour they were slowly proceeding down the stream.

There was silence for a while. Noel’s heart was leaping wildly with eager hopes and fierce anticipation of success. Heloise let her hand hang over the gunwale in the clear and warm water, and averted her gaze, full of a

pleasure she dared not own to herself. Thus it was that when the river broadened to a pool—shallow but not muddy—and Noel left the mid-stream and began to carefully steer his frail craft towards an island, she made no remark and no resistance. Perhaps it was the dreamy warmth of the day—perhaps it was the sultry sun, the closeness of the air—made her slumberous and idle ; but she said not a word, nor looked where they were going. She remembered how she herself had taught Noel the channel to this very island—the channel she had learnt long, long ago in childhood, winding in and out—now round a sandbank, now by the thick weeds—over the shallow bottom, clearly visible with its pebbles and its white nodules of chalk—winding in and out, till they left the mid-stream far away, and the prow of the skiff shot into a natural harbour formed by the tall green osiers, and grounded in the sand. Then Noel laid his oars aside, and turned to her, but was silent still. She was drooping as it were over the side of the boat, toying with a water-lily, her face mirrored in the dark water—



dark here because in shade. Tall reeds just beginning to push forth their feathery flowers hung over her, and the great bulrush was within reach. The green osiers, thick and impenetrable, lined them round on three sides, and almost shut them in completely, save for one narrow opening, through which every now and then a cool air blew intermittently from the river. They sat so still, so silent, that the fish disturbed by the boat returned to their feeding grounds, where the air blew the insects off the osiers and the reeds into the water, and slight splashes, and a circle of tiny wavelets now and then, showed where the trout or perch had risen to the fly. The timid moorhen stole out from the osiers, and swam to and fro in the mouth of this green cove, pecking at the weeds floating on the surface of the water. Overhead the swallows flitted through the clear blue sky, and the monotonous cry of the coot sounded over the river.

‘Heloise.’

She turned and looked at him, the quick blush rising into her cheek. He took her



hand—he came nearer, he pressed it, he kissed it; still she said nothing. He was about to take her in his arms, but she held him away, and said in a faint voice,

‘Noel, this must not be.’

‘I do not wish to—to—’ said Noel. ‘I wished to apologise for my indiscretion the other day. Will you forgive me? You know that I must love you. I cannot help it, Heloise. Am I to blame for what I cannot resist? Do *you* blame me?’

‘I do not blame you, *dear*’ (the word escaped her unawares); ‘but it must not be again.’ Then with sudden earnestness, ‘Noel, let us be friends—let us be companions—let us wander about as we used. Bury this old dream, dear, cast it away—it is unworthy of *you*. I will never remember it if you will not. O, do let us be friends again.’

And she took his hand in both of hers, and actually deceived herself that she was persuading him out of his infatuation. They were playing the same old comedy—they were playing before themselves; wearing

masks to deceive themselves, to prevent the recognition of the true self.

‘I will, indeed,’ said Noel, returning the pressure of her hands, and laying his other hand on her arm. ‘I will indeed, dear. Forgive me, darling; but I must tell you how I love you; then you will do me justice; you will see how hard it has been for me; you will pity me, Heloise.’

And he came near her, and poured out what I cannot write—a low murmur of wildest passion and love and entreaty, till she sighed, and their lips met, and in a moment friendship and companionship was thrown to the winds, and they were fast in each other’s embraces. She heard the loud thump of his heart as her face pressed against his breast, nestling there. She looked up, half smiling, and placed her hand there, and asked him why it beat so loudly; and of course he told her it was for her, and for her only. And she kissed the spot, and put her ear there, and listened, and believed, till the tears came into her eyes. Then he kissed them away, and held her close, and murmured more wild

love, and played with her arm, and kissed and fondled it, and placed it over his shoulder and round his neck. Then he whispered words again, and drew a picture of the walking for ever hand in hand through sunshine and over flowers, and gradually brought it round to a foreign country, and drew descriptions of the beauty and the wondrous marvels he had seen; and O, if she had been with him! till she sighed, and clung to him, and deceived by this— But wait. It may be that if Noel had had patience, and gone on thus long enough—if he could have repeated the game day after day for a month, and gradually accustomed her mind to the idea, till it failed to alarm her and grew familiar—perhaps he might have won easily. But women cannot be taken all at once; they must be prepared, educated up to the desired point, by slow and imperceptible degrees, but in the end they most eagerly desire the very thing they dreaded a few weeks previously. Noel was too impatient, and deceived by those warm arms clinging to him as he painted his picture, he ventured too far, and once more

made the fatal proposal that she should fly with him. In an instant Heloise had started away.

‘Take me home, *sir*!’ she said, trembling and turning pale. ‘Take me home—this instant—this instant!’

And she snatched at one of the oars; and before he could prevent her, sent the boat out of the cove into the pool; and Noel glancing round saw a punt with a man fishing, and cursed that punt bitterly in his own heart. Then his wrath rose against her, and he reproached her and raged against her, and called her evil and hard names, and swore, and declared that he hated her—hated her—hated her.

And she, trembling still, cried faintly to him to take her home; trembling till the frail craft fairly shook. He seized the sculls, and forced the boat bumping and swaying and scraping over sandbank and stones and weeds, till they swept into the mid-stream. Then she put forth her hands, and pointed wildly at the shore; and he still cursing and raving ran the boat against it, and she sprang out, and

fled away across the fields, soon out of sight behind the hedges. Then Noel burst into a fit of discordant laughter.

‘What shall I do with this?’ said he aloud, looking at the two bottles of port Heloise was taking to the cripple. ‘Ha, ha, ha!’ And his wild laugh sounded over the waters.

He gave way with the oars, and drove out into the pool till he came to the punt, in which some man, baked and scorched with the sun, was fishing, and asked him if he would help drink them. The man, nothing loth, joyfully assented, and they drank together; and Noel continually laughed and made jokes. The fisherman thought it odd; but the wine was good, and he was exceedingly thirsty, and so he said nothing. When they had finished it, Noel flung the bottles at a huge stone that stood up out of the water, and rowed back to the boat-house at Bourne Manor. There he secured the boat, and went away to Knoylelands, and so up to London in the evening by the express, cursing Heloise in his heart, and mad with passion, rage, and disappointment, swearing that he would see her no more.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

IN a long-forgotten number of a magazine there once appeared a piece of the truest poetry with the saddest meaning that was ever written by human pen. It had an unattractive title; it was barely noticed in the reviews; it fell into total oblivion. How utterly fatuous it is to believe that a thing survives if it is but worth survival! Look at those famous classics, for instance. Here, it is true, are Plato and Xenophon, Thucydides and Lucretius; but are there not also Martial, Catullus, and others, the only beauty of whose books is their learned lewdness? The fittest does not survive; the noblest and the best too often pass away utterly unnoticed, while some trashy gaudy thing works itself into the very heart of the public, and lives there for years.

This poem told how a little goose-girl, a



child who minded the geese on the common, 'went singing' along the road one fine day in the year 1999, and came to a school, where the scholars—girls and boys of her own age—instead of playing in their dinner time, were hard at work studying—reading, reading, reading; poring, poring, poring—till the bell rang, and they returned to their forms, and pored and read in chorus as they had previously done individually.

The school-children and their teachers were horribly scandalised with the little goose-girl, who came along in the middle of the broad day idly singing, slowly sauntering in the sunlight; and they came round her and wanted her to learn too, to read and write and pore, as they did, from morn till night, through spring and summer, autumn and winter, till the face grew pallid and the shoulders stooped. 'I do not know what you mean,' said the little goose-girl; 'I live in the sunshine all the day long, and I watch the clouds in the sky, and listen to the birds singing, and I sing too always.' 'But this is very wrong,' the teachers and the school-children argue, 'for we must all

work, work, work, and learn, learn, learn, as hard and as long as ever we can; still adding two to three, and three to five, for *everybody* does;’ *everybody* through the whole of the land in that year 1999 was learning and reading and studying hard, hard, till their brows ached, and their lives were shortened; still they must learn. To do otherwise were wrong and evil. ‘I do not know,’ said the little goose-girl.

‘The mills of the gods grind slowly,  
But they grind exceeding small.’

She will have none of their teaching; she cannot understand what it matters, whether this row of figures is added to that to-day or to-morrow; to her, life is not in books nor figures, it is not spent on a slate. Life is in the sun and the sky, in the wind and in the wood. So she will away, and have none of their teaching.

‘The mills of the gods grind slowly,  
But they grind exceeding small;  
I will sit on the hills, by the gods’ mills,  
And watch the slow atoms fall.’

So she goes away into the sunshine, and leaves the children and the teachers still teaching, teaching, learning, poring, reading,

wearing out their very eyes. There is a deep and sad significance in this poem of the little goose-girl. I cannot but think that she was wiser far than the teachers and the school-children. We have become so imbued with pen, ink, and paper—we have grown up among figures and calculations, among learning and teaching, till it has become to us a second nature, and we exclaim at the bare idea of the little goose-girl, ‘What shocking ignorance!’ But think a while, in what does this knowledge consist—this arithmetic for instance, these rows upon rows of figures, which the little goose-girl saw them adding up with such feverish anxiety. This arithmetic—add up ten thousand times ten thousand slates and copy-books, work up forty million sums absolutely correctly; and how, in what way, have you really benefited—have you *lived* the time that you were thus employed? Would not the sunshine, and the air, and the forest, and the clouds in the sky have benefited you more, had you spent the time among them, learning, as the little goose-girl did, that the ‘mills of the gods grind slowly,’ than all this purely

artificial labour? Ay, but it must be done; we cannot live without it; we *must* learn and teach, these figures are essential to our modern life. Granted that that is true, and is not this the saddest part of it all, that we cannot all dwell in the sun and the sky—that these artificial labours, these miserable, petty, *unreal* works should be necessary to our existence? I once knew a gentleman, a man of business, who declared and firmly believed that figures were everything; you could do nothing without them, and everything resolved itself into figures; and he meant account-book figures—ledger and day-book marks, literally 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and so on. Poor fellow, what an utter blindness must have possessed him! he forgot that man had a *soul*. Now the little goose-girl was nearer the God of the soul than all the teachers and school-children ever would be. All these vast towns of our day, these millions upon millions of houses, full of millions upon millions of people—these whole provinces built over—what are they but great schoolhouses, in which the men of money, the capitalists (I mean no reflection upon them) are as the

teachers in the school, and the workers as the scholars—all of these capitalists and workers hard at it, poring, poring, poring for ever; with their eyes shut to the sun and the sky, and for ever cast upon the wretched earth, with its mud and moisture, its coal-dust and smoke. All arithmetic and no God! The little goose-girl upon her common, with the cackle of her geese coming down upon the breeze, with the light of heaven upon her open brow, with the song on her lips, was happier and far nearer the ultimate search of all men than the whole of these.

But we cannot all be little goose-girls, and there is the sadness of it. We bless the railways, and the manufactories, and the coal, and the iron, and the cotton; and yet sometimes are we not tempted to think that the men who invented these things cursed their race more than the fatal crime of Adam did? for they have caused the enormous population of our time. There are millions upon millions of human beings, each with a brain, a heart, and a soul; and yet not one in ten thousand has ever the chance to commune with Nature,



to walk reverently in the temples she has built, and to know the mysterious awe which falls upon the mind in the near presence of its Creator. I know not what will be the end of it; all I know is that nothing but evil and disaster can ultimately result from it.

And watch society, the faithful reflex of the motions of the great heart of the people. Society, that thinks it leads and lays down a model for the people to copy, and which is in reality but the elastic representative, the outcome of the populace, or rather the logos of the multitudes. What does it do? Is it not ever restless, dissatisfied? See how it runs to any new diversion. Now it is canoe travelling, now it is Alpine climbing, then polo, pigeon shooting, bicycling, croquet, spiritualism (this the saddest of all); weary of all things, dissatisfied with all; artificially born, artificially bred, reared artificially, fed with artificial mental pabulum, till it is incapable of understanding the natural, till it sees nothing in the sun and the sky but space and a candle, and believes that the Whole Duty of Man is—Arithmetic. It is very miserable to think of.



And after all it is no one's fault; we did not make the circumstances, we cannot alter them.

Neville had lived almost the life of the little goose-girl; he had dwelt in the sunlight, lain upon the grass, *inhaled* through every pore of his body the influence of Nature. He had been happy in this. He had believed that with Georgiana he should be happier still. Somehow with familiarity that happiness slowly departed, and he could not return to the old, old ways. Then came the whirl and excitement of a novel life—the life of the upper ten thousand. He flattered himself at first with the reflection that after all, as a student of the earth, he should not confine himself to Nature alone, to trees and woods and sunshine. He ought to study Man. He studied man at Ascot, at Hurlingham, at Kensington, by the Thames. He grew more and more restless. While he had lived with Nature, though he could not penetrate behind her veil, and though he could discover nothing new, no sensation, yet he had been peaceful, wanting nothing. Now he never rested. And

he found it the fashion not to rest; to be ever seeking new sensations—to rush hither and thither. He found it to be ultra-fashionable to do worse than this; to languidly remain in one place, and be ever bored, convinced that nothing that may possibly turn up, however well it may promise at first, can result in anything but a bore at last. But being a man who still retained his habit of thought, though people told him thinking was a bore, and acted on their precept, he turned to those about him, and began to inquire if there were no remedy for all this vacuity.

‘Remedy!’ said the Duke. ‘By Jove! the only remedy is—to get *drunk*. That’s the long and the short of it. Fearfully immoral, degrading, and all the rest of it, of course; quite agree myself with all that. But look here, you may safely bet that the experience of all the world goes farther than our mere maxims. And just see what the world does. The world, my dear fellow, the world *takes its drops*. And opium-smoking is gaining ground in London—fact; I’ve been and seen it out of curiosity. The fellows look

in a dream ; they are happy, they forget everything. Depend upon it, the only remedy is to get drunk.'

'But the devil of it ith,' said the Hon. Mr. Vane, lisping, 'I can't get intoxicated ; I mean—I—I get sthoopid, you know, but I alwayth *know* I'm dwunk.'

'Effect of education,' said the Duke sententially.

'I think,' said 'Billy' (heir to a viscount), 'that the very best thing we could do would be to go to Arizona and hunt the Indians. Murder would be a new sensation ; you read in the novels and see that blood gives a peculiar feeling. It would be rare fun potting the bronzed beggars.'

'I think,' said Neville, speaking in a dreamy, far-off manner, 'the very best thing for us all would be the discovery of a new continent ; not one like America, where one can get across it and find the sea the other side, but an illimitable continent—a forest, a plain, mountains, rivers, lakes without end—stretching away for ever ; a continent into which men might wander day by day for ever

and for ever, beginning in youth and going on till death came, straight away as the crow flies, and never reach the other side; a continent which hundreds of generations of men might take up each other's tracks—as the one dropped the other taking up the journey—and yet never *arrive*, but be always travelling onwards, onwards, onwards. Then we should have a resource—somewhere to hide ourselves; *now* the world is so small.'

'There's something in what you say,' said the Duke; 'not that I can bring my mind to believe that the world is so small as our physicists define it. One's natural sense goes against it; one cannot understand the possibility of travelling round it in a few months. It is quite true that all the calculations come right; but then they say that so they will if you treat the earth as a plane. I would rather it was proved a plane, for then it may be of greater extent, and there may be, as you suggest, more continents yet to be found.'

'“Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest,”’ said the embryo viscount.

“If that’s the true definition of heaven,” said Dean Swift, “then it is clear there are no women there. For—who is the woman?” However, I’ll lay you odds on Merry’s lot,” said the Duke; and they were soon busy with their note-books and pencils.

‘They tell us,’ said the Duchess to Georgiana that very afternoon, ‘that the ladies are the weaker vessels; but, my dear, look how wretched they are with all their hunting and shooting and betting, and all their barbarian “sports.” See how they yawn and talk about *ennui*. My dear, they have not got the resource of the bonnet; there we are immeasurably superior.’

But Georgiana did not smile at the jest so merrily as had been her wont of late. In truth, the great doctrine, the grand law of nature—reaction—had begun to set in in her case also. This whirl, this excitement without emotion, this constant seeking for something new and its concomitant *ennui*, had had its effect upon her also. She too grew weary, restless, dissatisfied. Had she been brought up in the millinery school, in the fashionable

hopes and fears, in the petty circle of ideas that are crammed into the heads of the girls of the period, no doubt The Bonnet would have satisfied her too ; and she would have gone on to the end of her life studying the grand philosophy of trimming, of flowers and feathers, and occupied with the vital question as to whether heavy masses of fruit were or were not *distingué*. But Georgiana had been accustomed for years to think, and now that the novelty of their new life was wearing off, the old habit of reflection returned to her. She asked herself if she was happy. A sigh was the reply. She had gone a good way through nature, she had walked in the forest and the field, though, to tell truth, it was a superficial *detail* study ; and now she had studied, *i.e.* lived among—for true study means to live among—the ways of men and women, the drift of the Gulf Stream of the world.

Many hundreds of years ago certain valorous men of might, especially one Pantagrue, much vexed in a deep and knotty question, stepped on shipboard, and sailing over ocean's waste, sought in unknown lands the famous



temple and the truthful oracle of the Bottle. They found this wondrous Bottle at last, and all the answer the oracle made to their inquiries was 'Buc, buc,' or as we say 'Good, good,' when we imitate the noise of port-wine as we pour it out of the bottle into the decanter. That was all—Buc, buc; at least so sayeth that famous chronicler Rabelais.

Now Georgiana had travelled the perilous road, the strait and narrow way, only open to the few and the select, which leadeth to this deep and wondrous oracle of The Bonnet; and the answer of the high priestess was what? that strings were not so becoming as no strings. There it ended. She was weary, restless, dissatisfied, like the rest of them. She drew away from them that evening; the jest of her grace had brought it to a point. She wished to be alone, and to think. From the window of her room she could see over the expanse of the Park, and the gathering gloom hid away the houses at the horizon, and there was nothing but a heavy, black, and thunderous cloud in the west; and on the edge of that black and inky sullen vapour there glittered

a glorious planet, a ball of white light—Venus. She was weary, dissatisfied. This *ennui*, this impossibility of finding satisfaction, led to a still greater mischief—to doubt. After all, was she—with all her high ideas of her mission, of the equality of women, their rights and natural prerogative—any better, wiser, nearer the truth and satisfaction than the rest of these butterflies, who never stayed to think, but took things as they found them?

Better far that we should believe, even if our faith be in a false idol. The devil has no instrument in all his arsenal that will blunt the edge of our better nature like a want of faith. When Chatterton, the boy-poet, lost faith in himself, he killed himself. The Book does not say so in distinct words, but does it not hint at it? When the greatest Prophet of them all struggled forty days in the wilderness, was not a doubt of His own mission—did the devil leave *that* temptation untried?

No better than the feeble, weak, frivolous creatures she had despised; no nearer the great goal, humanly still as low, herself even incapable of improvement; no better than

those who had taken things as they were. Her marriage, perfect in her theory, how had it turned out—better than theirs? She gazed at the noble and lovely planet on the edge of the deep black cloud, and thought of Neville and the first transports of their love. If that would return—if she could have had that always—if Neville—

But the great planet sank beneath the murky vapour, and the slow tears gathered in her eyes.

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RESTLESS HUMAN HEARTS.

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# RESTLESS HUMAN HEARTS.

A Novel.

BY

RICHARD JEFFERIES,

AUTHOR OF 'THE SCARLET SHAWL.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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## RESTLESS HUMAN HEARTS.



### CHAPTER I.

NOEL hated her, hated her, hated her. This was the one burden of his mind ; it rang in his ears the whole day long. With all her loveliness, her indescribable grace, her slender graceful form, like the slowly nodding wheat-stalks in the gentle western breeze ; with her deep, deep eyes, her overhanging eyelashes, and the delicious glances that shot from them ; with her white and delicate hands, her tiny feet, her voice—ay, her very voice,—he hated her. Noel stormed about London. He went straight to his club. He dined—he blamed the soup, the fish, the wine ; the first was *sour*, the second was stringy, the third was hot. The waiters stared at the odd taste of the man. The fact was, he had no taste.

He had lost it for the time. Violent passion had acted upon him like a fever; when the tongue refuses to distinguish between one flavour and another, and even tea, which one rushes to as a grateful refreshment, is unrecognisable. It might as well be ditch-water. The turbot might as well have been a ropy turnip, for aught he could tell. He did not eat, he gulped it down in large pieces; he did not drink, his throat burnt up the liquor as it ran down, just as the dry sands of the deserts burn up the rivers that try to run over them. He stormed at the papers. He turned over the *Times*, the *Daily News*, the *Standard*, the *Telegraph*, the *Globe*, the *Pall Mall*, mechanically. His eyes ached—they glared—they smarted as if he had been walking on the Parade at Brighton in a high wind, and got them stuffed full of sand in the orthodox sea-side way. The evening was warm—he was stifling. His dress, light as it was, clung to him. Outraging all usages, he tore his shirt open, undid his collar, and stormed out of the place into the open air. Much good it did him. He gasped—then he stormed along the

streets, tearing away till the perspiration stood in great drops on his forehead. This man had been used to hard exercise all his life ; latterly he had had none. In his excitement, all unconsciously, but quite naturally, he reverted to his old associations ; his steps led him down to the river-side. He hired a boat—one of those long racing skiffs carrying one only. It was thirty feet long, or nearly ; narrow as a knife's edge ; thin, shallow—a lath upon the water. As he rowed away with quick feverish strokes up the river, the boatman shouted to him to take care of the sandbanks up by Richmond—since those dams had been built the banks had risen. Noel swore at him and held on rapidly, tearing his arms out with the long sweep-like oars. They were oars indeed, no spoons to shove a boat along with ; but thin delicate spars, well balanced, broad at the blade, taking a grasp upon the water, so that the boatman could feel it ; and moved by his nervous arms, the skiff shot through the water swift as a swallow through the sky. It was a lovely night, a June night, which is only a second day. In the north the

sky was white, with a little yellowy tinge—the sunset lingered there all the night through. The west was still rosy, and in the east the full moon shed her light upon the water, and the trembling beams played upon the waves made by his progress. Noel saw neither the moon, nor the sunset, nor the water. All his idea was to work his passion out of him—to drive it out with still more violent exercise. The narrow skiff rose, as it were, in the water, with every stroke ; rose and skimmed along the surface, and before it could sink, rose again, and slid over the glittering moonlight. Heedless of drifting barges, heedless of heavy sailing-boats tacking slowly across the stream, heedless of an occasional steamer, he rowed on straight as an arrow up the river, on, on, till the banks grew wilder and more natural, and though he saw them not, great patches of weeds stretched out into the stream—huge nets spun by the spider Death to catch the unwary. Panting now, foaming as it were with heat, his hat thrown off, his arms bare, his forehead set in a stern frown, he rowed and pulled and struggled against the inevitable



moment when strength, though ever so great, must fail, and endurance pass away. He grew wilder at it as the boat slowed, it angered him; he pulled less regularly, feathered more slovenly, and swung his body too much to aid his arms, till the skiff trembled and shook; and still on, on, heedless of the course, till—

The broad blade of the scull in his right hand dipped deep into a thick patch of rope-like weed—a great web, a net of vegetation—and refused to rise out as he finished the stroke. Now Noel, as an old boatman, should have simply lifted the oar out of the rullock, and let it drift after him in the water, by which means it would have disengaged itself easily. Had he been calm he would have done so involuntarily, and out of long practice. But he was heated and tired; heated in mind and body, ready in an instant to fly into an outrageous and unreasonable storm with anybody or anything. Therefore he gave a violent pull at the oar as soon as he felt the weed. Result—the oar refused to move; meantime the left oar went swiftly through the water,

and gave an impetus to that side of the boat, so that it swung round the oar in the weeds as on a pivot, and the prow of the skiff ran up into the weeds. Left wrist raised the left oar out of the water involuntarily, preparatory to another stroke ; right wrist, finding it impossible to pull its oar through the weeds, involuntarily set to work to back water. Balance of the boat lost, and Noel in the water. The cold dip chilled him for a second, and he barely knew where he was. The next he rose to the surface, with a mouthful of muddy water, and his hair in his eyes—but his mind cleared. The shock had driven away the feverish excitement, the maddened excitement of the moment previous ; he was cool in body and mind at the same instant. He stretched out his arm to seize the keel of the skiff, which had turned bottom upwards ; but his reach was not quite long enough, and his hand fell on the smooth side, which afforded no hold. His hand slipped down it into the water, and the skiff, sensitive to the least touch, glided away out into the stream, and floated off. Left oar had floated down the stream

long ago ; right oar, which had done the mischief, was sticking out of the weeds, half in and half out, about three yards off, aslant, but between an impassable mass of weed. Noel saw all this in a second, and struck out boldly, and without a thought of fear, for the opposite side of the river, which he could see was clear of weeds in the bright moonlight. He struck out, and the water bubbled around him, and his arms passed through it. He could barely believe his senses. He did not move. He struck out again—the water bubbled and gurgled in his ears, a wave dashed some into his nose ; but he did not move. It flashed through his mind in an instant that it was his trousers which had prevented him from feeling it. He knew what it was, he knew the sensation of old—the cold slimy, twining, snake-like Thing that wound round the leg, and stuck to it, and could not be shaken off. Only when bathing naked you felt it ; with the trousers on you got the effect, but not the sense of feeling the slimy Thing. The effect was this—that you struck out harder and harder, and instead of moving forwards, your head bobbed

down, and your mouth went under water. You kicked and kicked, and you could not get rid of it; and the more you kicked, the more it curled round you. Then there was a sense of a great weight all round you—an oppressiveness; you panted, and feebly cried for help, and struck out again, and every stroke weakened you. You tried to float; but the moment you ceased to strike out your head sank under water, for your leg would not rise to the surface, and it was impossible to get the lungs in their proper position. The whole thing flashed through his mind in an instant. The weed had got hold of his leg. Unless he could get that weed free, or unless some boat picked him up, in ten minutes, ay, less than that, he must infallibly drown, and no swimmer's skill could save him. And Heloise? The drops of sweat stood on his brow as he thought of her. All his love rose up in his heart strong as death itself.

Remorse? Of course I know all that; he ought to have beheld his own conduct—his own attempt to carry her away with him—with the deepest contrition, with penitence,

gasping for forgiveness, longing for life only to receive her pardon and the pardon of Heaven. He did nothing of the kind, being a real man, who took his feelings from himself, and did not persuade himself into feeling what books told him he ought.

Instead of remorse and penitence came a remorse indeed, but of a very different kind. A remorse that he had not continued with her till he did do it, till he did succeed. Contempt, hatred of himself for his miserable impatience, his poor wretched feeble bursts of passion—above all for running away from her. *He* a man! Heaven give him life again, if only for a little while, till he could have her, he must—he *would*! He tore at the weed—he struggled—he kicked—and the more he kicked the tighter the accursed Thing wound itself around his limb, and clung to him, and pulled him down. He shouted for assistance, he cast his eyes wildly up and down the river: not a sign, not a sound. There was a great black barge moored a hundred yards away, laying like a hearse upon the water. The idea struck him that possibly one of the barge-



men might have remained on it to sleep under a tarpaulin, as they often do. If he could only wake him ! He shouted—he literally screamed, his voice rose so shrill into the night air—his breast panted. A wave dashed into his face, and half choked him for an instant, and all the while his arms had to keep cleaving the water, or down he went over his mouth. Despite all his skill, great gulps of water would get down his throat and turn him sick. Once he glanced up at the calm round moon, and her soft light fell full upon the agony of his face. The memory of the last time he had seen the full moon rushed into his mind—it was as he stood under the oak-tree at Bourne Manor watching the light in Heloise's window. Heloise ! In a moment he had forgotten moon and sky again, and was in a desperate struggle for life. He felt that his strength was failing him. The long hard row, the savageness of the way he had pulled, spending double the strength that was necessary, had almost exhausted him before. Then the chill of the water, and now this perpetual struggling and shouting. The shouting, perhaps, more than



anything ; for what is most dreadful to swimmers is growing shortness of breath. When the lungs labour, the strength of the arm is of no avail, the muscles refuse to fulfil their office, the power to make an effort, the least spurt, dies away. He grew awfully conscious that he must husband his strength. It had become an affair of moments now. He would shout once more, and see if by one last desperate hail he could wake the sleeping barge-man in the hearse upon the water. He threw himself as high as he could out of the water, and sent forth a stentorian cry. Then he sank back and listened, striking out with as little splash as possible, his ears acute. Nothing. All was still : no answer came over the water ; nothing but a gentle puff of wind, which blew against his forehead. He dared not shout again, he felt so weak. How little can our wisest decisions be accepted as the best ! How true it was of the ancient Grecian who said that, after all, our wisest attempts to discriminate between this course and another are no better than as if we threw the dice, and guided ourselves by the chance of the numbers ! Noel

determined not to shout again, lest he should exhaust his breath. Had he done so he would have been heard; for that last long hail had penetrated the tarpaulin, and had gone through the still thicker tympanum of the half-drunken bargeman asleep upon the hearse. He rose up on his knees, lifted one edge of the tarpaulin, and sleepily peered out on the water, and listened. There was no repetition. He could see nothing, hear nothing, save the wash of the tiny waves against his boat. He yawned, cursed his folly, and laid down again.

Noel's time was nearly up; either he must be saved, or must die. That he knew now: the suspense was nearly over.

Then in the silence of the night, on the eve of the great change, there came back to the man all the instincts of his own savage nature—all the instincts of the prairie, the desert, and the sea; all the instincts of the mind trained to battle with Nature and to beat her by superior cunning. If he could have only time to think!

There must be some way of beating the

weed, if he had only time to think. If he had only spent the time in that he had uselessly spent in struggling! This weed: he tried to consider its nature. It was long, it was tough, it was like a piece of string. He could easily break it with his hands if he could get hold of it, but he could not drag it apart with only water as a fulcrum. He slipped one hand first and then the other down to try and reach it; he could not. Should he twist himself up, shut his mouth, hold his breath, *sink*, and grasp it? He might find it, he might not. He might entangle his arms and even his head in another; then it would be all over. Kick as he would he could not throw it off—it rather grew tighter. How, then, had it got round his leg—in what form? Clearly it was twisted—it was round his leg in a spiral. How to undo a spiral? Why, of course, he must untwist it—that was the secret. But which way must he turn to do so? Experiment only could decide. He rolled over and over in the water three times, turning with the sun—then kicked and struck out. Evidently he had twisted it tighter, for now he

could feel it like a band round his leg. Without a second's delay he rolled round the other way three times, and paused. It was still there, but not so tight; he had reverted to the old state of things. He gave another turn, and instead of kicking struck out with his arms only, letting his leg drag behind him. He moved, he felt the accursed Thing slide down his leg; it lingered at his foot, he kicked with his other foot, and it was gone—he was free! He struck out all of a tremble—not with joy but exhaustion—twice, thrice, four times, which carried him well into the stream. Then the sky whirled round, bubbles seemed to burst into his ears; he was afraid he should faint. Mechanically he threw himself on his back. He could float now. The relief was intense. He forgot everything but the relief, the sense of the removal of strain. He half closed his eyes, and paddled with his hands. He grew drowsy, even dreamy. He thought he saw the moon over Bourne Manor-house, and the great mansion rose towering over him black and threatening.

Bump! bump! bump! Drifting with the

stream, his boots (they were very light ones, but they were boots) had come bump against the moored barge, not a foot from the bargeman's uneasy head. The man did not wear a crown, but his head lay uneasy for all that, even on a coal-begrimed plank. He had not been able to get to sleep again. This bump startled him. He was up in an instant; he looked out, saw what he took to be a corpse in the water, seized his boat-hook, and thrust at it. This was a new danger for half-unconscious Noel, for a boat-hook is in fact a spear, with a great fish-hook on one side. At the first thrust the spear-head part went just between his arm and his body, and the rounded part of the hook pushed him under water. At the second the spike narrowly missed his neck; but as the pole was drawn back, the fish-hook part hitched in one of his braces and held fast (he had his coat off for rowing, remember). Up the boatman hauled him, till his head and shoulders were brought out of water.

‘D—n!’

The bargee half dropped this swearing

corpse into the water again, and remained staring at the horrid thing with great mouth wide open. The braces had begun to half-choke Noel. Then this dialogue took place between the fisherman and the fish he had hooked :

‘ Who’s there ?’

‘ Fool.’

‘ Where didst th’ come from ?’

‘ Help me in, ass.’

‘ Be’e alive ?’

‘ Sha’n’t be long.’

‘ Give us yer hand !’

‘ Pull me nearer.’

‘ Hold tight—there.’

Noel had half scrambled and been half dragged into the heavily-laden barge. He asked for some brandy. Bargee had no brandy—there was some beer in the can; couldn’t get it all down, or there wouldn’t have been any of that. Noel opened his mouth, and motioned : bargee lifted up the can, and poured it in. Noel drank steadily on, shutting his eyes. The strong liquor stole through his body, warming his chilled frame.



For a sovereign bargee rowed him ashore in a dingy, took him to a small public, where he got a suit of somebody else's clothes, rather grimy, but dry. Another sovereign to bargee, and his name and address on a slip of paper, and in an hour Noel, by means of a cab, reached his hotel. Strange to say he was not tired now. The liquor, beer and brandy, he had taken had strengthened him. On the whole the bath had refreshed him now it was over. He dressed again in another suit, and went down to his club. It was midnight—they were hard at cards. He watched the play, for he could not go home and rest. His mind was at work. It was Heloise, Heloise, Heloise! He must have her. Rage, passion, impatience, should never interfere again. Thus it was that he overheard a short conversation.

‘Saw him last night. Shouldn't be surprised to see him here any day.’

‘Good brass to show himself.’

‘Pooh! Louis is equal to—knave, and odd<sub>2</sub>trick, by Jove.’

‘And the other—Lady Knoyle?’

‘Has had’ (a whisper)—‘misdeal, by G—d!’

A light shot through Noel. His cheeks glowed, his eye glittered. He left the club. An idea had occurred to him.





## CHAPTER II.

EVEN Pierce, blind as such men are, might have noticed something unusual in Heloise at this period; but he was much occupied with the realisation of an old dream—what he called his ‘Cantonal System’—which he was putting into operation on part of the estate he had inherited. This necessitated a great many days of absence, and often, when he returned, he was tired, and not so sensitive to those slight variations in the domestic barometer which are at once perceived by those who have nothing to do.

Not that there was such a marked difference in Heloise after she fled from Noel out of the boat; but for the whole time—the remark about Pierce applies to the weeks preceding that event, as well as those which followed—she was in a state of dumb terror for days and days. The abyss upon the edge of which

she had stood, and which had almost, almost tempted her to throw herself over it, still seemed to yawn close to her feet. She dreaded Noel's approach; she sat with the door of the room partly open, and listened to every sound. But he came not! Days passed—a week; no Noel. Timidly she ventured down to the boat-house; there was the skiff moored to the stage. He had returned with it, then, but he had not come to the house. It shot through her mind in an instant he was angry, he was in a terrible passion, with her! Must it be owned that she brooded over this thought; that it made her miserable? She who had just escaped from the ruin and disgrace into which the step he had proposed must inevitably plunge her now made herself wretched in the fear of his being angry with her. If she could only see him; if he would but come and speak with the most distant politeness; if only she could see him! She walked about the garden—she moved restlessly about the place; she went out into the roads—into the lanes—into the well-remembered places where she had walked with

him in those happy hours in the spring, finding the flowers for Pierce's garden—in a vague hope of meeting him. She was not afraid of meeting him now as she had been after the first time she rejected his attempt. Was it that she felt her own power to reject him—to repel him? Was it that she forgave him, believing in the wildness, the maddening depth of his love for her which drove him to these courses; that she saw his love—his former passion—and in her heart of hearts clung to him more and more for it, though it had given her such horror and such pain?

The idea of fear, of hiding from him, the dread of violence, never occurred to her now; her one thought was to see him. This first week lengthened on, and became ten days; then she began to blame herself, to call herself cruel, unkind. He loved her beyond all words, and she had fled from him rudely, abruptly. She could have sat still, and told him that she could not do that one thing. Instead of which she had rushed away, as if he had been the pestilence, rudely. She had rejected his love, thrown it away. He was angry;

she should see him, perhaps, no more. And then this foolish girl began to weep. Watching and waiting for him thus, too much absorbed in her own feelings to note anything very much, it still, in time, grew upon Heloise that she was watched in return. She grew to have an ill-defined idea—a sense that some one was following her from field to field; that a pair of eyes peered at her from behind the hedges; that through the bars of distant gates a form observed her. She felt that it was not Noel. It could be no one else—it must be fancy, but it was a fancy she could not shake off. It grew on her till she, fearless all her life, became timid, and shunned the footpaths and the fields, choosing only the broad and open roads, and these in sight of Bourne Manor; or, at furthest, not beyond view of the old sign of the Sun Inn, beneath the tall chestnut-tree. The superstition folded itself round her like a snake, gradually narrowing, till she hesitated to pass beyond the garden—till she even disliked to look forth from the window.

It seemed as if there was a presence—a sense of some one in the neighbourhood—that



came upon the very air, and was most oppressive in the evening, so that she came to pass her time within the house again, waiting wearily for Noel, listening to the footsteps, to the opening of the door, listening to the voices.

But he came not. Not a word—not a sound—not a glimpse of him. The poor foolish heart yearned for him, and hoped against hope.

‘He is so passionate,’ she said to herself, ‘he is offended; he thinks I despise him, I do not value him! He will not come—he will not come!’

Pierce too remarked Noel’s absence. At last he sent a servant over to Knoylelands to inquire after Noel’s health, fearing that he was ill. The answer was that he had gone to London. This confirmed all Heloise’s worst fears—he had left her, he would not return!

She had worked herself up into a low fever like this. There was a look of dejection in the eyes, dark circles under each eyelid, a red spot on each cheek. ‘Anything but that,’ she kept repeating to herself, ‘anything but that! O Noel, Noel, I will do anything but

that !' Once, and once only, she thought it was cruel of him ; then she turned against herself, and called herself hard-hearted, cold, indifferent. What was her love to his ? Hers was poor, weak, thin. There was no vigour in it —no fierce hot passion, no lava-flow. *His* was the love. Her cheeks burnt as she thought of it. A true woman, she could not help the natural pleasure of feeling that this love was for her. She grew more and more miserable.

All this time Noel was 'storming' away in London, telling himself that he hated her, and that she did not love him one jot. Even when a note came from Georgie saying that she was coming down to see her for a week—just a week—all by herself, it failed to rouse Heloise. For months she had looked forward to a promised visit from her friend with the warmest anticipation ; now it was only a few days distant she waited without impatience, cool, uninterested. When the day came at last, she took the pony-carriage, and drove to meet her at the railway station. She drove herself, and, intent on her ponies (she had a pair), did not notice the passengers on the

road. She had gone a mile from Bourne Manor, when a voice cried 'Stop!' In a moment all her old dread of being watched returned, notwithstanding the presence of the man beside her. Involuntarily she cut at the ponies, and then just as involuntarily dropped the reins, for there came on the wind 'Heloise!'

It was Noel! The man caught the reins and stopped the ponies. She held out her hand. Had he been less occupied, he must have been gratified with the warm welcome in her eyes.

'You frightened me so.'

'Come down,' said Noel, not heeding the remark. 'I have news for you.'

His white face, pale from suppressed passion, struck her in an instant; as it were, the pallor was under the brown of his skin. Her first thought was Pierce; no, he was safe at home.

'Come down,' said Noel again, seizing her hand; 'I know Georgie is at the station, tell the man to drive on and meet her. I saw her—we came down by the same train unwittingly,' he added in a lower voice, as Heloise

stepped out of the carriage. 'I slipped away unseen. I want one moment with you—one moment before I leave you for ever.'

Her heart beat; the blood rushed into her temples. The driver went on with the ponies. Noel led her unresistingly out of the road into a field. There was a stile, and beside it a pool, and a small osier copse and tall rustling reeds. Heloise, trembling with excitement, unable to speak or to look at him, leant against the trunk of a willow. For a moment he was silent. His breath came in short pants.

'Heloise darling,' said Noel, laying one hand on her shoulder.

Her eyes met his: there was such a look of the deepest devotion, the gentlest love in them, that might have melted the heart of a panther. But man in his passion, how can he be compared to a panther? The brute suffers from the comparison. That look drove the blood tingling through all his frame. He gazed down at her—his statue was much greater than hers; and the colour came and went in the strong man's cheek. He paused, he hesitated, even now that his hour was

come. The very look of devotion—this unselfish unquestioning love, that did not upbraid him, but forgave, forgot, and loved on—this look told him in an instant that the day was his. And yet he lingered—he paused. The words he had come so many miles by express train to say would not leave his lips. His gaze fastened upon her; her head drooped. He passed his arm round her shoulder and drew her to him, and again, yes, once again, a long, long kiss.

‘Ha, ha, ha! *à la Les Huguenots!*’ cried a metallic voice.

They started asunder as if the electric bolt had fallen.

‘Tie your handkerchief round his arm, *ma chère*. How do, sir?’ This to Noel, with a mocking bow.

Louis, Lord Fontenoy, stood before them. Heloise saw him and shuddered, and shrank away; not nearer Noel, but away from Louis—away from her lawful husband, whom she had sworn to honour and obey. But even above her horror of him arose a new feeling—an inexplicable curiosity, a strange dread and yet desire to know what was that behind him.

Was it a baboon trained to follow its master, and to peer over his shoulders? Was it—there flashed through her mind ghostly tales of the nursery, used to frighten children from staring at themselves in the glass, lest they should see the devil looking over their shoulders. Behind Louis was a man, a tall thin shabby man, grinning. There was nothing peculiar in the man except his eyes. He peered over Louis's shoulder. He peered on one side of him, always keeping in the rear. This was the presence that she had dreaded and instinctively shrunk from.

‘O, don't let me interrupt you,’ said Louis, bowing again. ‘Beg pardon; really quite distressed;’ and he made a motion as if about to pass on, though it did not for a moment deceive either of them.

‘Quite an accident, I assure you; nothing further from design. Was it, Randal—eh, *mon cher* Randal? This is my shadow, you see. Monsieur Randal and I have been—well, well, on the *qui vive*, dodging madam here, as they say; but we didn't wish to be seen—O, dear no. We thought you had gone on further,



to a quiet spot not so near the road ; so we came through the stile abruptly—a great mistake. Beg your pardon, sir ; beg your pardon, ma'am. Randal, we had better move on—hem !

Shame, horror, distress, poured upon poor Heloise. How she stood she knew not ; her knees faltered, her frame trembled. Her face grew pale as death. Her hands twisted in and out each other nervously. Her mouth worked piteously. She could not move. She was fascinated. The presence of Louis fastened her to the spot. And Noel ? For one brief moment in him, too, shame was triumphant. He shrank back before the man who, bad as he was, was the Husband. So great a power has moral right, it drives back even the strong man, wild with stronger passions, but only for a moment. In an instant rage rose in his heart ; he raised his hand, that hand which could have smitten the little wretch—Louis was of a small stature—into dust, as it seemed, with a blow. He stepped forward.

‘By what right—’ he began. Had Louis wavered he would have struck him ; but the Husband stood still and sneered. Sneered in

the strong man's face. And Heloise shuddered, and saw the Eye peering over his shoulder. That horrible eye, which quivered and flashed and twinkled, and winked and flashed again; the watching eye, the *evil* eye.

'Whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder,' said Louis. 'But that's an old-world fable, of course.'

The strong man's arm fell. Louis sneered again, and advanced a step nearer Heloise.

'One kiss, just for old acquaintance' sake, dear,' said he.

Heloise stepped backward, and stretched out her hands as if to keep him away.

'Ah, well,' said Louis, 'let bygones be bygones. Here, kiss my *wife*;' and he seized poor unresisting Heloise and pushed her towards Noel. 'I don't mind it—really I rather like it; now *do*.'

You might have heard the teeth grind in Noel's mouth.

'You cold-blooded scoundrel, you villain, ruffian!' he hissed. 'You—you *left* with your wife's sister, and she has had—an—an—'

Even in that hour of rage, of fiercest con-

flict of emotion, the love that was in him made him hesitate out of delicacy for Heloise. What he could whisper he could not say out loud before these men.

‘Has—had—an—illegitimate—child,’ continued Louis, pronouncing each word slowly.

‘Is this *true*?’ cried Heloise, suddenly starting forward, and seizing Louis by the arm; she literally hung on his lips, her very soul seemed to listen to the answer.

‘It is true, my lady; isn’t it, Randal?’ said Louis jauntily.

‘Quite true,’ said Randal.

Heloise turned to Noel, and looked appealingly at him. This was as much as to say, ‘Save me! dispel this horrible dream! say it is untrue!’ Noel’s face turned away from her. He had come all this way to tell her this; now that she knew it his tongue refused its office. But she understood him. Her form, which a moment before was limp, in an instant grew rigid. She drew herself up to her full height, and said calmly: ‘Then God have mercy on my soul!’

‘Devil of devils!’ swore Noel in a frenzy

of rage. Those simple words, that tone, he grasped the meaning in a moment, because he had anticipated it—she could resist *him* no longer. He threw out his hand as he would have thrown a stone. Louis, quick as thought, sprang backwards; but, quick as he was, he did not entirely escape it. He rolled crash through osiers and reeds, with a dull thud on the earth, felled as he had felled Heloise a year ago. Randal fled like the wind. Noel, bestowing no more thought on Louis than on so much dead carrion, turned to Heloise.

‘I must go,’ she said slowly.

He placed her arm in his, and drew her away across the fields towards the station. As he walked, he begged her to be calm—not to faint, not to weep. She answered him never a word, but she did neither. She walked steadily, swiftly, holding herself upright, looking neither to the left nor to the right.

This blow, for the time at least, had turned her to very stone. It tore away the veil, the gauzy film, which time and distance had thrown over Louis’s desertion. The true significance of his elopement with Carlotta had now come

upon her with its full force, its overwhelming horror and repulsion. Now it fell on her like a thunder-bolt. It paralysed her. Her one thought was to go—to get away. It would be a lie to say that she did not know she was going with Noel—she did; but at that moment the thought of the guilt of the act was not present to her. Her one impulse was to get away—to fly with and to whom but Noel? She hurried along; he asked her not to do so, she would overheat herself, strain herself. She did not heed him. On, on, over the green meadows, smelling with the new-mown hay, fresh with the fragrance of a thousand flowers. The well-remembered stiles, the hedges covered with the dear dog-roses, her favourite flowers—all passed as in a dream. The road again; now, then the station and the waiting-room; and still she had seen nothing, felt nothing, but the one irresistible impulse to escape with Noel. She sat down on the velvet-covered sofa in the waiting-room. Noel inquired for the next train to London. It was due in ten minutes. He got the tickets and came and stood by Heloise, but said nothing.

Two, three, four, five minutes. She was growing impatient beyond all control. He left her and went out on the platform. Anxious as he was not to be noticed, not to be seen by any stray acquaintance, he walked up and down on the open platform, totally unable to remain still. He glanced at the books on the stall—he turned over the *Graphic*—glanced in through the window at Heloise, and walked again up and down to and fro. He stood on the edge of the platform, and gazed down the long, long lines of rail, then up and down once more, and back to Heloise, to stand by her a few moments—then out again. A sharp ring on a bell—a perceptible bustle—the train is in sight. Heloise walks out beside him calmly, and stands on the platform, pale, but apparently emotionless.

They see the great engine coming nearer and nearer, growing larger and larger—they see it shake and vibrate, they hear the shriek of the brake as it is screwed down hard and fast. A crowd comes out and jostles them; and in a moment there shoots through Heloise's mind the memory of a long-past day—



that afternoon when she stood here arm-in-arm with her husband, a newly-made bride, blushing, hiding her face, glad to escape into the shelter of the carriage. And now? Another man stands beside her, and *he* is lying still, motionless—perhaps maimed—among the osiers and the reeds. But she stands erect and fails not, for the brutal boast, the horrible disclosure, is still ringing in her ears. The train draws up, she steps in, seats herself. To Noel it seems an age, to her a moment only, and the bell rings, the whistle sounds, and they are on their way. On their way to what? She does not ask herself; she is frozen. And Noel?

When we have long striven for a thing, worked for it, studied and schemed for it; when we have waited and dreamt of it, and time, slow time has passed away, and still it is afar; then, when at last it comes, and we grasp it, the mind refuses to realise it. How easy for Heloise to step into this carriage, what a simple act! yet what a world of thought, of emotion, of passion, and misery, that little act contained in itself! He hardly

knew it yet—hardly recognised the stern fact that she was sitting by him—*his* Heloise—speeding away with him into the dark and unknown future as fast as steam could carry them.





### CHAPTER III.

SOMEHOW Noel was not altogether sorry that they had not got the compartment entirely to themselves. He did not wish to pause, to draw back. He felt not a moment's hesitation; but he knew instinctively that it was better, for a little while at least, that Heloise should not be alone with him. She was so white, so cold-looking, so utterly absorbed in herself, that there could have been no pleasure, no trembling love, no delicious kiss. These people in the carriage with them acted as a kind of tonic upon her. She was obliged to conceal her bitterness—obliged to try and appear to be in a state of mind conforming to the usages of society. Noel thought that this would help her to get over the shock of the revelation which had been made to her, and to forget in some measure the significance of the step she had taken. These commonplace

surroundings — these strangers — would in some slight measure prevent her from dwelling upon the violent course they were pursuing.

So the train rushed on, and they did not even speak to each other, and the silence of the compartment was only broken by the rustling of newspapers or the noise of the paper-knife tearing its way through the leaves of a book. Station after station, and still no word. Noel in truth knew not what to say to her. He felt that her mind must be in a most critical state, and he dreaded lest he should strike a wrong chord, and even now she should escape from him; for there were plenty of opportunities. She had but to leave the carriage at either of the platforms they stopped at; she had only to call the guard, and no force he could employ would be of any use. Even as it was, when they reached London, she might turn from him with a sudden horror, as she had done twice before. He racked his brain to find some means of coercing her: he would get her into a cab quick, that was certain, and that was the only

thing he could think of. He would have given worlds to know what she was thinking of, what unconscious resolves were growing up out of her reflections. Heloise did not think; she was still; her brow was pale—just the faintest indication of a line on it, as of pain; her eyes gazed far away with an abstracted look; there was every outward sign of thought, but she did not think. One great fact stood before her, one fearful wrong, one miserable sinful deed, but which did not strike her then so much as a sin, but as an inextinguishable wrong done to her, justifying any course on her part. This was why she had called the God of heaven to have mercy upon her soul. When Louis unblushingly avowed the truth, she felt that all bonds were broken; henceforth she must go where Noel chose to lead; she had no power of resistance. She would not rush from him now—she had no incentive to do so. The wrong and the right, the evil and the good, had all got so inextricably mixed up with each other, there was no choice.

And shall it be owned—it was human

nature, she could not help it—there was a bitter resentment, a fierce hatred growing up in her heart, the germ of which had been sown, and had budded at the moment the truth came out? She had been too miserable and too astonished when Carlotta left with Louis to hate her. Perhaps she despised her also too much for that. She did not think of Carlotta then. You will remember that she had been ill, and had been brutally ill-treated by Louis. They were at that time mere shadows, having no tangible existence. But now—Heloise, you see, had had no offspring—the hatred that springs from a fierce and instinctive jealousy was raging in her heart. This was Carlotta's work. This is the terrible result of all evil work—the beginner of it knows not where it will end. It spreads and spreads, like waves, each succeeding the other, till it passes out of sight. Not that Carlotta would have cared. Could she have seen the swelling heart in this poor girl's bosom, it would have filled her with fiendish delight—it was a torture she had not reckoned upon dealing out to her half-sister.



Heloise did not think; her mind was full of one vision, her heart full of one passion. The vision was the avowal of Louis; the passion was this fierce ineradicable jealousy. For Noel her feelings at that hour were naught; her love slumbered. It was as strong as ever underneath, but it flowed like a warm spring under a glacier. It was sheeted over, weighted down with an icy coldness which it could not move away in an hour, but through which it must inevitably eat its course in process of time. To Noel she had but one feeling—a passive one—that he must lead her wherever he chose. She must follow him as a child follows its parent; she had no thought of the consequences; she did not, indeed, at that time recognise what they must be. Her great impulse was to go, and Noel was her guide. If he had known this, he would not have racked his brains for means to detain her, should any turn of her mind carry her away from him again.

In time—after an hour or so of this dull travelling—it did slowly dawn upon him in a degree. He watched her pallid face; he

saw the line of pain in the otherwise smooth forehead; he saw the eyes so set in a deep and abiding agony. Then his gaze fell upon her lips—the lips that had clung to his so warmly and so full of love—that he had seen only a little while ago working so piteously. He saw the scar on the lower one: it did not move him to indignation now. She seemed so like a child, tossed hither and thither between the passions of men. A tender pity welled up in his heart, all hardened with passion as it was. They had used her so ill—his sweet Heloise! What had she done, to be injured thus? A pure and loving heart, an innocent fragile creature, born to dwell in the sunshine only, what had been her history? They had sinned against her deeply. A pang of genuine remorse shot through him as he remembered that he had done his best—he who loved her so dearly—to add to the undeserved misery which had been showered upon her. He had persecuted her with his evil love; he had pushed her on to the path she was now pursuing. The man's mind trembled in the balance. He looked at her,

and he pitied her. He looked away from her, and the hot fierce love in his heart rose up and revolted. Should he let her go? He was half persuaded to do so. And then his heart hardened again. Now that he had got her to a great extent in his power—at all events, unless he gave up his attempt, and returned with her, she had inextricably compromised herself—now that the long-chased creature was caged at last, his soul smote him in secret. He worked himself into a fever, trying to decide. What should he do? Should he take her back, confess to Pierce, and beg the old man's forgiveness, saying that it was his and his fault only—that Heloise was innocent and pure, a mere gossamer blown about by the evil ways of men? It would be a miserable confession to make—for him, who had shared the old man's noble hospitality, all unsuspecting the corruption his guest was introducing into his most cherished treasures. The shame of the very thought of it brought the red glow into the brown skin of his cheeks. But he conquered it; he would face that; he was not afraid even of

disgrace; if his mind was firmly set on it, he would face that.

But could he give her up? Let him ask himself fairly. After all the trouble and the toil—the long, long months of love and restlessness—the waiting—ah, that was worst!—the waiting? He remembered the slow hours—the days that would not pass—the long-wished-for moment of bliss, which never, never came. He remembered the manner of his approach; he recalled the scene in the shady nook, and that other on the island on the river—how, just as he had held her in his very grasp, strained to his heart, she slipped from him like a shadow. And his heart hardened again.

So the struggle went on: his love fought against his better nature; and the ultimate result was a truce between them. He determined that if Heloise showed the least desire to return—if she showed the least reluctance to accompany him—he would not oppose her. He would do all in his power to facilitate her return—even to kneeling on the ground at Pierce's feet. He would watch her

face, her words, and the tone of her voice. He would be guided by her wishes.

O fatal sophistry—miserable self-deceit! It was thy duty, Noel, to have led her, and not to be led by her; thy duty to save her from the evil of thine own ways.

This was London. The long, long platform; the crowds of eager faces waiting for friends lit up by the innumerable gaslights, for it was evening now; the lines on lines of cabs; the porters holding on by the door-handles, and running beside the train. They had reached it without a word on either side. Noel had not spoken. Heloise had not uttered a syllable. She followed him on to the platform mechanically. He paused then an instant, beset with porters asking if he had luggage—did he want a cab. He looked at Heloise. She was standing close beside him, apparently looking at the cab line. She made no sign. He took this for an answer in the affirmative—that she wished to go on. He ordered a cab: he handed her in and gave directions for the Strand. He chose an hotel there because he was afraid that if he

went to one in the West-end he might meet an acquaintance, or even some one who knew Heloise. He wished to pass on to the Continent, but it was too late that night, the tidal train had gone. They must wait till morning. The cab rattled out of the station into the streets. His hand stole over her lap and took hers. It was cold, it did not return the pressure. But he could feel that she was shivering—shivering that warm summer night. He put his arm round her and drew her nearer to him. She did not resist. She leant against him wearily. He whispered her name tenderly. She said ‘Yes,’ and no more. He remained silent, only pressing her gently at times near to him. More rattle and shake; more street; more noise and gaslight. He could not hold her to him now in this glare, with these armies of people on the pavement.

The cab stopped—there was a great doorway. A boy in buttons ran out and threw the cab-door open; a waiter came slowly down the steps. Noel got out, and held out his hand. She followed him unhesitatingly. He paused upon the pavement in front of the



hotel. She paused too. The boy in buttons stared at them. The waiter stared. The cabman stopped in the act of descending from his box. There was something they could not understand. Noel looked at her. She was standing near him, her face turned away, her gaze down the narrow street. The wind up from the river blew her hair and ruffled it; the flickering gaslight played upon her pallid countenance. There was no sign of reluctance. He took it for consent. But he never asked her—he stopped short of that. It would have been the same if he had; but he ought to have done so. He stepped up the hotel steps. She followed him like a dog down the passage, she still behind him. There was a lady behind a species of bar here (not for the sale of liquors—an office in fact), who watched their approach pen in hand.

‘Two bedrooms and a sitting-room—my sister,’ whispered Noel. He had to write his name and her name. He made it Browne on the spot, and wrote it clearly and distinctly. These little details were not the things to deter Noel.

‘Any luggage, sir?’ said the waiter behind him, rather suspiciously.

‘It is at the station—we go on to the Continent by first train,’ said Noel.

They showed him the drawing-room. He walked to the window: Heloise sat down wearily.

‘Bring some wine,’ said Noel.

He approached her and laid his hand on her forehead. Her head fell forward on his hand, leaning heavily.

‘You are very tired,’ said Noel, as the waiter entered with the wine. ‘You must have a glass of port.’

He poured it out; she drank it as he bade her to. Then her head sank on his hand again. He drew it on to his shoulder, and there it lay as if dead. He stroked her hair down as he had done in the old days in the shady nook. He whispered to her of his love: he dwelt upon her name, giving it that tone which love alone can give. She did not reply, but he fancied she came a little closer to him. Then his voice fell and he was silent too.

Up through the open windows came a low dull hum—the hum of the living multitudes still moving in the streets. The shriek of the railway engine echoed now and again; the curtains of the windows moved to and fro with the current of air from without. Noel glanced round the room—it was large and lofty. The pictures on the walls, dimly seen by the gaslight, frowned down upon them. Out through the windows he could see one faint star. Deeply as he loved, the situation became painful after a time. He whispered to her to retire—it was late. He pointed to the door of her room, which opened on the drawing-room.

‘That is mine,’ he said, pointing to another door on the opposite side.

She got up and walked across, away from him.

‘Heloise!’

She paused, and looked round.

‘Will you not say good-night to me?’ He came nearer.

‘Good-night,’ she said, quite calmly.

He seized her by the shoulders; he im-

printed a kiss on her lips. They did not return it.

‘Go,’ he said, almost hoarsely.

She went. The door closed behind her. He was alone. He went into his own bedroom and sat down. He was almost angry with her. She was so cold, so unloving, so utterly devoid of all feeling. It did not seem like the Heloise he had loved. After he had wound himself up too, to give way to her if she wished to return. Resentment struggled hard to find a complaint against her. He paced up and down the room. A deep frown grew on his face. He began almost to think that he had made a great mistake. He had applied violence to a delicate flower, and even as he grasped it in his hand the flower withered, lost its perfume, and its beauty ceased to please him. Did she cease to please him—was his love already dead? And the first evening—his anger turned upon himself. He was weak—he could not wait: it was his own fault. She was tired, overwrought, exhausted: in the morning she would be better. He had been cruel to her—he regretted that

cold harsh 'Go,' as if she had been his slave. He would go back, knock at her door and beg forgiveness. No, he had better not; she would be frightened. He dared not intrude upon her privacy. But he would be very kind and gentle to her on the morrow. The morrow he must arrange about their journey. He took from his pocket a 'Bradshaw' he had purchased, and began to study it.

Mechanically Heloise began to undress. Her shoulders were bare now—their beautiful, glossy, sheeny skin, white as snow—were bare, and her long dark hair flowed down upon them in all its loveliness. She was about to brush it, and then she discovered she had no brush. She glanced round the room. Then her position rushed on her with full force. This simple want of a brush brought it before her mind vividly; what all the railway journey, the cab, the waiters, had failed to do. Then she was with Noel; now she was alone. She rose, and walked involuntarily round the room. When she entered it, she had stepped across it as boldly as if it had been her own at Bourne Manor; now she had

realised the change her step was slow, hesitating. She walked as if she had no right to be there. She glanced at the pictures—out at the window. It was a lovely night. The river was before her, a great broad sheet of glistening water. The moon sent a long path of trembling light across it. Dark boats shot hither and thither. A sailing barge stole out of the shadow into the moonbeams; a steam-tug went by. To the right there was the clock tower of Westminster Abbey. A loud whistle, and a rattle that made her start, and a train went noisily across an iron bridge. It was London. She turned away, and went back to the glass. You see, the sense of guilt had not entered into her yet; it was the strangeness, the novelty of the position that affected her. She tried to think. She felt thirsty and parched. She walked across to the washing-stand, taking with her the candle. She put the candle on the stand, and poured out a glass of water. She had her handkerchief in her hand. There was a little noise just then—some one moved in the next room. In an instant she remembered Noel was there,



and a sense of delicacy overcame her—a faint colour came into her face—she involuntarily raised her hands to conceal her neck, and turning to seize her shawl, dropped the handkerchief. One edge of the handkerchief, as it fluttered down, touched the candle and burst into flames. The smell alarmed her ; she turned and saw the handkerchief in a blaze upon the floor. It burnt the carpet and smelt horridly.

Now there were several courses she could have pursued with equal safety. She could have calmly watched the handkerchief burn itself out; the thick carpet would not have caught, it would only have smouldered a minute or two. The handkerchief would have been ashes in a minute. She could have let it alone with perfect safety. But no mortal can let the thing of which it is afraid alone. Or she could have flung the shawl over it, and stifled it instantly. Or she could have emptied the water-jug on it, and put it out with ease. It is simple enough for us at this distance of time, and sitting at our ease, to devise plenty of means by which so trifling an accident could have been met and overcome. Nothing

maddens one so much as to hear people commenting on these things: ‘O, if she had done so and so!’ Just so, *if* she had;—forgetting that in her place, ten chances to one, the speaker would have equally lost presence of mind.

Heloise, dreadfully frightened, did not altogether lose her presence of mind. She saw in an instant two resources—the water-jug, or to stamp it out. Her mind was rather in favour of the water-jug—water is an instinctive remedy against fire—but as she stepped forward to get it, her foot seemed to almost involuntarily raise itself and stamp on the handkerchief. It was her very terror that thus made her rush at her enemy. Her fiery enemy lying there on the floor wished for nothing better. The moment her foot stamped on it, the sharp tongue of flame leapt up like an adder, and seized hold of her light muslin dress. She had the skirt on still. The light muslin dress shot up to her waist, circled her with flame in an instant. Instinctively she put her hands down to push it away, and they were burnt, and the sharp pain pricked her.

A terrible scream rang through the room, out into the passage, through the corridors. over the whole hotel they heard it. Another and another.

The 'Bradshaw' fell from Noel's hands. He did not know where the scream came from; but it seemed near, and his heart in an instant was with Heloise. He rushed across the drawing-room. Fortunately Heloise did not practise that sheerest folly of locking her door—he opened it; a fearful curse burst from his lips.

She was flying round the room, screaming piteously and horribly; her white arms extended, her dark hair floating behind her—to her waist a mass of fire; no higher, thank God; he saw that even in that instant. The stays did so much good, with all their evil, and the body of her dress was off, remember. He met her as she came round. In this awful moment the man's coolness came to him readily, the coolness acquired in a thousand dangers. He met her; he did not attempt to seize her—to do so would have burnt his hands, and made him powerless. He struck her full in the chest, not heavily, but a smart blow. She

fell instantly. Then he flung shawl, quilt, pillow, sheet, blanket, under-sheet, and was tearing at the mattress, and all this before the first alarmed waiter came to the door. The waiter helped him; in half a minute the fire was smothered under that heap of things.

Then they lifted her up tenderly. Her head drooped; her arms fell by her side. Her eyes were closed, her face pale as death. They laid her on the bed—rather, on the bedstead. The clothes dropped from her, ashes. There was a smell—of wool and linen, of course: that was nothing; but a smell of—

Noel, who had been so cool and so prompt, walked backwards, repelled from the bed, right into the drawing-room, and fell upon the sofa. He held his head in his hands. He felt *sick*. Yes, sick. This strong man, this very Hercules, who had faced hell itself, felt faint and sick, like a girl who has seen a horse run away from her window. His bowels literally heaved, the muscles of his internal organs quivered; it was that horrible sickness without vomit.

It was the smell of *burnt flesh*.



## CHAPTER IV.

HORTON KNOYLE, the banker, had been in the City that very night that the accident happened in the Strand hotel. He had been in London a week for the first time since Carlotta's disappearance with Louis. His proud and sensitive spirit could not brook the eyes of his fellow-men after that event—not, at least, the eyes of those who knew him most intimately—the men of the Stock Exchange, the workers in Lombard-street. He remained in Paris, making no sign. He did not conceal himself there, but he could not come to England, large as was his business there. He transacted it still in the old cool successful way; but he never saw the Exchange for a whole year or nearly.

Then at last, when it was all forgotten, or seemed to be so—when forty new scandals had succeeded to the public favour—then he

persuaded himself once more to go to the old familiar places. He returned to his desolate house in Mayfair—the house that he had furnished so nobly for Carlotta so many, many years ago. There were other reasons than business that brought him back—other reasons than even the old memories, the old ties and associations. These latter he would sooner have escaped; but there was a certain yearning—a yearning that his iron heart had not felt this many a day—for the company of his own kin.

Georgiana's long letter about Ella and Claudius had awakened a chord long vibrating in his heart. He called her up in his memory—his sister—the only relative now left to him, as it seemed. He acknowledged to himself that it would have been better, perhaps, if he had cultivated her society more in the olden time, rather than allowing his whole existence to be concentrated upon gold. He might then have had a warm heart to cheer him in these latter days; for the man knew that he was growing old. It was not so much the actual years; it was the sense of



the death, one by one, of all the old hopes, the old ambitions that had animated him.

This letter of Georgiana's brought her before him so vividly that with all his mind he forgot the years that had passed over her too, and thought of her as the tall girl in her teens who used to worship her elder brother. For her sake, he was exceedingly kind to Ella and Claudius. To Claudius he took a particular fancy; but he longed for Georgiana. So he went to England, thinking to be near her always; determined, if possible, to get her to be with him as much as was practicable.

There was still another reason why he now sought London: this was his nephew Francis. Victor had entirely disappeared. He had never claimed his 300*l.* per annum; it had accumulated at the bank: he had passed completely away. Horton never thought of him; he was a man of steel still; he did not forgive, he did not overlook the faults of others, not even with his declining years. But Francis he had sought for diligently and ceaselessly, and in vain. He too

had disappeared, and no amount of money, no energy on the part of the police, could discover the whereabouts of the fair, the sickly-looking, but rather handsome beardless boy, whose photograph was placed in their hands. He too had never drawn his allowance ; it had accumulated at the same bank as Victor's.

Feeling as he did the burden of his years, and anxious about his heir, Horton determined to conduct the search for Francis in person. On the spot, he could urge on the police, and direct them by the power of his own mind. He came to the old, old house in Mayfair—to the deserted rooms, to the stately furniture, to all the evidences of the reckless expenditure, the princely magnificence in which Carlotta had revelled. He passed into her private apartments. Nothing had been touched. For a whole year, the things had lain just where they had fallen. On the dressing-table her jewel-case was lying open. He looked at it; the great and noble diamonds were gone, but there was the glitter of two or three more ignoble rings.

He took these out; one of them was the ring he had given her when they were engaged—a single emerald of large size. It had been her fancy then. She had taken the valuable diamonds; she had left the ring, which had no value comparatively but its associations. Horton noted this. He replaced it carefully in the box, and shut it up out of his sight. There was her shawl, thrown down on a chair; a scarf fallen on the floor; a few of those long raven hairs still adhered to the brush on the dressing-table. It seemed as if but yesterday she had been here.

The old man did not sigh; he did not regret her; but he sat down on the fauteuil, and buried his face in his hands, and looked back through the vista of his life, far away to the days when his heart as well as his mind had had a life—when there was a romance, a glamour over his labours, thrown by the marvellous beauty of his young and glorious bride. He did not regret her; he was even glad that she was gone; it was a relief, and he had felt it so this year past. But he did regret the feelings and the days gone from him for ever.

But it was not his nature to be weak thus. He left these rooms, locking them behind him as he went, and called the carriage to go to Georgiana's in Curzon-street.

When he arrived, she had left that very day for Bourne Manor. This was a disappointment, not great, but bitter to some extent. He had longed for family ties, for an affectionate friend; he had come for it, and he had to wait. He knew that it was his own fault entirely—that if he had kept up the connection with his sister, as he should have done, she would have been here awaiting his arrival. He had not even telegraphed that he was coming. Still he turned away dulled, dispirited. Then he went down into the City, to the office in Lombard-street. The clerks had gone, save the two who constantly resided on the premises, and one of these was out; the other stared in dumb amazement, but of course showed him the deepest respect. He shut himself up in his private office; it smelt close and unpleasant. He opened the window, and the roar of the great City came in, and the warm wind of the summer even-

ing blew the papers about. He gathered to him some that had lain about his desk—that had been there for twelve months—rough memoranda of things to be done. Among them he picked up one—a half-sheet torn across, and on it these words: ‘Mem. to alter will.’ That was all. He stared at it as in a dream. He had not before realised the full significance of the events that had passed over him. Carlotta had fled; Victor and Francis had disappeared; Georgiana was married (after a fashion). He was alone; he had no kin. This vast wealth which had grown up around him, till its ramifications extended he hardly knew where—if he died, where would it go? It would be wasted, frittered away. Georgiana would, indeed, have her share; it should not be a small one. But Neville, her husband, he had hardly seen; he had no affection for him; he was a dreamer—no man who could step into that office, and learn to work that enormous organisation. Who else was there? Absolutely no one. For a second he thought of Pierce—of the old man who had been so delicately considerate, so thoughtfully kind to

him always when he had been at Bourne Manor. Despite all his lack of sympathy with Pierce's nature, he could thoroughly appreciate his nobility, his upright simplicity. He could appreciate it; he felt its worth, though he could not enter into it or understand it. He recollected that Pierce was a peer now, with wealth, if not so large as his own, yet very considerable. He wanted nothing.

Then, strangely enough—born, perhaps, of those strange things he had seen that evening—there came to him a memory of the boy Claudius and the girl Ella, whom he had seen in Paris, wandering away hand-in-hand into the unknown of the art-land, seeking after beauty and truth in all innocence and trust of each other. The deepness of the contrast between their young lives and the life that he had led came home to him full and bitter.<sup>1</sup> Why had not he had those artistic tastes, those æsthetic yearnings, that insatiable love of the beautiful, that all-satisfied pleasure in in it, of these two—this happy pair? He envied them for a moment. They sought no power among men, no gold; they attempted to



build up no mighty business to overshadow the whole earth, and to fill the thoughts of the world. They dwelt in the sunshine : it was their gold. They sought for beauty : it was to them a power. For truth : it was their ambition.

Then there arose in his mind—in the mind of this millionaire, whose days had been spent in the counting-house, heaping up the hard cash, the idol of the world—an almost reverence for the bright hair of the child Ella ; for the oval face, the earnest eyes of the boy Claudius. Through a world of sin and shame, of misery and of sorrow, filled with hard-struggling men, they walked calmly as gods, and as with the fabled gods, the flowers of beauty and of love sprang up around their feet. In that hour these two became to this man, whose heart had been dry so many years, as his own children. A love was born in his soul, and went out after them. He formed no definite plans, he thought of no material good that he could do them ; but his mental vision followed them ; he could seem to see them now. Through the thick walls, the far

distance, across the sea and the smiling plains of France, those forms came to him.

The moonbeams fell through the window upon his head, as he leant it on his hands in the silence of that chamber, surrounded by his books, his book of gold, his safes, his papers—all the signs of worldly might. The low roar of the City fell lower, till it almost fell unheeded on his ear. The silence of the room was unbroken, save by the rustle of some errant paper now and again, as the breeze came for an instant or two through the window. How long he leant thus over his desk he knew not. Possibly he might have slept.

I cannot give the rationale of these things. Possibly it may be that the body possesses organs of which even the delicate researches of our day have not given us any clear idea. They may have powers, a sensitiveness, of which we are perfectly ignorant. In the darkness, in the silence, and in the solitude of the night the ear becomes conscious of sounds which even in the silence and solitude, provided only it be day, are utterly inaudible. You

may try this for yourself. Sit in a country house in a room alone in the broad daylight. Let the wind be still; you hear nothing. The furniture is wood, and iron, and leather, and velvet only; it has no innate life of its own. The doors are still, the handles devoid of motion; you are not conscious of anything. Sit in the same room at night under the same circumstances. What is the difference? The table creaks, the chairs crack, the door-handles rattle, the doors move, there are odd indescribable noises in the passages. There seems a presence all round you. May it not be that the soul, or the mind, whatever it is that receives the senses of sound and sight, and is conscious of the visions they evoke, may at times possess, in the same way as the ear, greater sensitiveness? May there not be a night of the mind, when noises afar off may reach and penetrate to us? All history and all experience tell us that these things do happen at any rate.

He distinctly heard a low faint scream, as if afar off, coming through many walls and doors, and even across miles of distance. He

hardly recognised what it was at first; but the thought of it grew on him, till he could seem to realise what a fearful, heart-piercing shriek that must have been. Then a species of awe, a strange new sensation ran through him, a desire to be gone out of this silence and solitude, a yearning for some human voice. He had never felt this before; he was ashamed of it now; but it grew on him. He felt that he must go. The noise of his footstep, deadened on the floor-cloth of the office, sounded low and ghostly; the door creaked as he opened it; the passage was dim and full of shadows. The sharp metallic click of the lock as he turned the key of his private room sounded preternaturally loud. Hastily he walked out into the streets, and with the first sight of the human life which still partially filled them a load was lifted from his mind. He was stepping out briskly, determined to walk to his house, or at all events part of the way, on this beautiful summer's evening, when he passed into a small crowd at the corner of the street. There was much talking and excitement, yet it did not look as if a drunken man

or a hysterical woman was the cause. He saw that most of the people had papers in their hands. Some news had arrived no doubt. He would not trouble himself with it; but the newsboys saw him, thrust their bills into his face, sang out their headlines volubly:

‘Extraordinary intelligence! News from America! Civil war! War of races! Extermination of the negro!’

Horton started at this — the negotiations with General Shebang were hardly concluded. He had not anticipated so speedy a result. He took the newspaper, paid for it, and stood and read it. There had been a smart fight in Arkansas, ten negroes killed, more wounded; a town besieged by the blacks a thousand strong, a steamer full of armed whites sent off to repulse them, large bodies of whites marching by land. If the whites could hold out till morning they would be saved; if their ammunition failed they would be massacred to a man. The bitter hatred of black and white had found a fearful vent, the passions of the people were already at an awful height.



He walked on again, slower now, swinging the paper in his hand. A week ago, and he would not have felt like this. He would have watched the progress of the struggle as unmoved as he would have the mimic warfare of the chessboard. The actors would have been mere puppets, shadows to him, not tangible realities of flesh and blood, capable of feeling pain and suffering death. Whether it was that he really was growing aged and less firm of nerve; whether it was that the events of the day, the visit to Carlotta's disused rooms, the memories of their past life and disappointments, the strange scream he had heard, or fancied he heard; whether he was growing more human, less a machine, or what? But a deep sense of guilt hung over him. He had not, it was true, set these wretched men at the miserable trade of war, and at the most awful form of that war—of race and of domestic revolution. He was not the leader, not the spirit of the movement. He had not planned it; but he had furnished the sinews, he had found the money. Every coin that he had handed over to Shebang was



the price of a human being's life. It would cause the shedding of blood that would outweigh it—it was worth its weight of blood. Not till now had the awful responsibility, the horrible responsibility of his position flashed upon him. He had looked upon it as purely a commercial speculation. He had looked at the pros and cons of profit and loss in that light. He had considered its probable success, he had endeavoured to guard against its possible failure. He had taken every precaution to guard himself against pecuniary loss. But this, this had never occurred to him. These men were even at that moment slaughtering each other; blood was flowing, wounds and death were doing their miserable work. Pain was stalking triumphantly over that wretched land. And he, walking safely, in perfect bodily health, along the quiet and orderly London street, respectable and esteemed in the eyes of the world, was the cause and the support of this terrible wholesale murder. He had encouraged it, his money had supplied the ammunition. He shuddered for the first time in his life. The devil seemed to dog his

heels. 'The death and murder of a world be on thee, monster!'

Who does not remember the fearful loathing with which Faust contemplates Mephistopheles after Marguerite is thrown into prison, and the consciousness of his evil deeds comes back on the unhappy scholar? Horton shuddered at himself first, then—how prone is human nature to throw its faults upon some one else!—he turned on Louis. Louis had inspired him to do this thing; Louis had advised him, convinced him of the practicability of the enterprise; Louis had betrayed Carlotta; Louis had betrayed him into this; Louis had been the fiend of his life. This was not just, Horton! He will not remain in this mind long; but for the time it contracted his brow into a lowering frown. Then he began to calculate whether Shebang had arrived yet; he hardly had—at any rate he could be but just landed in Orleans, carrying with him the fatal money. These preliminary riots must have been fomented by his agents; on his arrival the great flame would burst forth. The misery of his mind, the loathing which

filled him at these sickening thoughts, told on his bodily frame. He paused, and looked round for a cab. There was none in sight. He stood and waited, a hansom was sure to pass in a few minutes. Just then a boy rushing out of a dark court, a short cut, into the full light of the crowded thoroughfare, his market, almost stumbled up against him. The boy had a great bundle of damp papers under his arm, a flaring bill in his hand. He cast this last at Horton's feet, flung two stones on it to keep it from blowing away, and began to shout:

‘Fifth edition! Latest from America—arrest of the leader of the revolution—more slaughter—horrible scenes!’

Horton held out his hand. He did not stay for the change of his sixpence—he motioned the boy away. He read as he stood:

‘New York, Night.

‘General Shebang, the notorious Communist, was arrested at New Orleans at six this evening, by order of the President. He had on his person funds to the amount of a million

dollars, which he was carrying to the heads of the revolution. The fighting—'

Horton read no more; a cab passed, he hailed it, and stepped into it.

'Thank God!' he muttered, 'no more blood.'

He did not regret the loss of the money—a load was lifted from his heart. As he passed up the steps of his mansion he did not notice a form that shrunk away into the darkness—a slight bent figure, prematurely old, with untrimmed beard and whiskers. 'It is him,' the form was muttering; 'but *her*—how long? how long?' And the creature shivered in the warm summer night.





## CHAPTER V.

MAUD'S eyes were red and swollen with secret weeping. She was not handsome at her best; these red eyes disfigured her greatly. They were in Paris, at the toilette; she acted as Carlotta's maid now. Carlotta, who had not noticed these eyes before, now that she came to sit before the glass, saw them reflected in the mirror, and began to sneer and rail at her, and bitterly stung her with cutting sarcasm. The day before they had learnt of Victor's death. As he had no papers about him, and no one claimed his body, it was almost a year before the news filtered about and reached them. But it did at last; and it struck Maud down like a blow from a hammer. She had spent the night in silent weeping. She had tried her best to remove the traces of tears, knowing that her mistress would taunt and torture her, but could not quite succeed.

Carlotta sneered at her for an old fool.

He was only twenty-five, she said; Maud was forty-six. Was she crying for her son, poor girl? There, she should have a new bonnet. She taunted her with her want of luck, with the manifest failure of her life, the plainness of her face. She actually rejoiced, or affected to rejoice, that it was *her* lover who had killed Victor.

Then Maud's temper, so long subdued, began to rise. The crushed worm turned; but it was only to give its tormentor the pleasure of seeing it writhe and make vain impotent attempts to sting, the very failure of which was another torture to itself. Maud had put up with the tempers and the insults that had been poured upon her these months and months, in the secret hope, nay the conviction, that Victor would most assuredly follow Carlotta. Wherever Carlotta was, there he would be sure to come. Her only chance of ever seeing him again was to remain in the service of this woman, who knew her failing, who whipped her with it. But now, after these weary months of waiting, Victor was dead—slain by the brutal lover of this very woman,



her bitter task-master. And that gorgeous creature, still blazing in the very zenith of her fatal beauty, turned and laughed at her—laughed at her for ill-luck, triumphed in the good luck, the magnificent fortune that had attended her, and everything belonging to her, even to Louis' pistol, which had slain Victor.

Maud's hand trembled, and her fingers clenched till the nails dug themselves into her very flesh in the eager desire to clutch the neck of this evil thing that sat all lovely in the chair before her—to clutch the beautiful neck till a red mark grew round it, till the eyes started from their sockets, till the face, so white now, grew dark and livid, till the heart of this cruel tyrant ceased to beat. She knew not how she restrained herself, but she did—crushing herself down to the last, trampling her feelings under-foot. Carlotta saw the effort, and laughed at her. She picked up a sharp stout bodkin that lay upon the table, a miniature stiletto, and told Maud to take it and plunge it into her neck, 'just here,' she said, 'here,' pointing to the soft swelling beauty of her bust. 'Drive it in—

kill, kill, kill!’ And a bright light shone in her eyes; and it looked almost as if she wished Maud would attack her, in order that she might fly at her in return, and tear her in pieces.

Then, as Maud busied herself with the hair, and affected to take no notice of the bodkin, Carlotta jeered at her for being afraid, a coward—and with a backward jerk of her arm sent the sharp point of the tiny stiletto into Maud’s wrist. Maud uttered a cry, and dropped the hair, and sank down on an ottoman, and burst into tears. Then Carlotta bit and stung her again with bitter words.

‘I shall go,’ said Maud at last.

‘Go, with pleasure; and where to? Who will take you after being in *my* service, you fool? No lady would admit you into the house.’

‘I know it,’ said Maud; ‘I shall become a sister of mercy.’

‘A sister of mercy! to foment old sores and watch the dying! How nice! what a delicious amusement! there are no smells in that occupation. Imagine Victor now brought in on a door—pale, wounded, bleeding—’

Maud rushed from the room. She left within the hour, fully determined, as she had said, to become a sister of mercy. But she first went back to Vienna, sought out Victor's burial-place. It was in one of the cemeteries unmarked; but she had no difficulty in finding the spot, for the authorities had taken precautions to identify it if inquiries should ever be made respecting the English stranger found dead in the grove with the bullet through his forehead. Maud set up a monument to him, and waited till it was finished, and came day by day for weeks to sit by this the grave of her one only hope, her one only romance. She was a guilty woman, no doubt—a fool you may call her, with her five-and-forty-years—a dupe, an idiot. But remember the crushed feelings, the long, long years of petty tyrannies, of miserable repressions; remember the heart screwed down, suppressed for so many weary years. She was but another victim of the circumstances of our social life. Victor was more to blame than she was. He had youth, freedom, money, every blessing. He ruined her for the gratification of the hour.

In return she worshipped him. Now she alone—the despised, the contemned—sat by his tomb and wept, and grew pale, sighing her very heart away. An old fool at forty-six! His tomb was not only the tomb of the only one who, however cruel in the end, had ever been kind to her, but was the tomb of all her hopes. Never again would the flower blossom for her. The flower of love, which to some blooms afresh time after time, had in her crushed life come to perfection but once; and that once was withered and snapped off and trampled in the dust. If he had lived—let him be ever so cruel, ever so unfaithful—if he had lived! But he was dead, and the world was dead to her.

She waited there a full month, weeping daily by the tomb, and then left for England, and, as she said, became a sister of mercy. In Carlotta's service she had saved a considerable sum of money. She had other references of her early days. They were glad to get this subdued, quiet woman of forty-five, with her soft touch, her gentle ways, into their ranks. She is there now: still subdued, quiet. To

the last she will be subdued and quiet. All the life has been beaten out of her, all the feelings and hopes and joys have been trampled down and pressed into the dust, from her earliest youth upwards. How many are there like her—for this Maud is no fiction, but a real woman who lived and breathed and had her being—and hundreds like her exist at this hour! Poor crushed miserable creatures, will not their one sin—that of a craving for a little love—be forgiven them?

And Carlotta calmly brushed her own hair, smoothing out the splendid sweep of the glossy magnificence, and gloried in the fulness of her own life. She marked the richness of her eyes, the delicate fringe of the eyelid, the well-marked eyebrow, the smoothness of the forehead. There was not a wrinkle in it. Why is it that these women escape the march of time? Even in the Antinous, there is a groove between the eyebrows, as if the brow contracted, if not with care or anxiety, with thought. But here there was no wrinkle, no line; all was smooth as polished marble. Is it not their sublime selfishness? Or rather, per-

haps sublime self-concentration. They carry this concentration of themselves to a length, that even the cares and troubles, the anxious thoughts that must beset them in their career of guilt, pass away like the hours of the day, unnoticed. Even remorse fails to touch them; they may feel it, but it glides away, leaving no mark behind. But Carlotta never felt remorse. Her sublime self-concentration was so great, so perfect, and she had always acted with such perfect adherence to what is called 'the logic of her type,' that she never knew what it was. What is remorse? It is regret that we have committed an act, or left undone an act that would have contributed to our moral happiness. If we had done so and so, we should be much nearer to moral perfection than we are now. The regret that we have not done so is remorse. Now Carlotta had no image of moral perfection in her mind to which to aspire. The conception of such an idea was impossible to her. Her only idea of perfection was physical and mental gratification of self. The only remorse that was possible to her was the regret that



she had omitted to enjoy some gratification that had been in her power ; or that she had neglected to seize an opportunity which might have led to pleasure in the future. But so consistent had been her pursuit of pleasure, that she could not reproach herself with any deviation, however slight, from the ideal perfection of her mind. Therefore she could not possibly feel remorse. Those who are consistent to their own belief never can ; and she had been consistent. Was she happy ? Without any hesitation, I say that she was—that she had been happy, far happier than thousands—even sublimely happy in her own self-concentrated way. The grandest absurdity with which poor humanity tries to console itself is the miserable fallacy that only the good can be really happy. This is in itself a contradiction ; for the really good will feel the wretchedness of others too much ever to enjoy themselves. It is one of those fallacies with which the disappointed human mind tries to console itself. It has failed to get the carriage and pair, the furs and ermine of the wicked ; therefore it says, ‘ Ah, but only the

good can be happy.' This evil woman, this being in human form who did not deserve the name of woman, had been, and still was, transcendently happy. She enjoyed herself. She was to herself an unfailing source of exquisite delight. The glossy smoothness of her hair as she brushed it filled her with an inward pleasure. The richness of her eyes, the smooth forehead, the swelling bust, reflected in the glass, the beauteous curves of the graceful arms,—all these filled her with a joy unspeakable. She lingered over her toilette that she might enjoy herself. There was much in this that kept Time from touching her. He ripened her as the sunshine ripens the peach. Her beauty was like that of the hot-house grape, it came to perfection just when all the fruits of the garden faded away, and withered up with the cold and the blasts of winter. Just when other women were withering and decaying—when their skin turned yellow and dry, when the hair came out of their heads, and here and there was a streak of gray, when the hands grew thin and bony,—she, instead of this, grew even lovelier, richer, full of a mag-

nificent overpowering beauty. It was the time of the full moon with her. She did not even regret the loss of the position she had held as Horton's wife; she had had excitement and admiration far greater than ever she could have had there. The dull splendour of their home had palled and deadened on her long before she left with Louis. She had longed for a wild maddening life; a life of feverish excitement, in the midst of which she could exhibit her own grand coolness, her own insulting calm. And she had had such a life.

The Archduke was sucked as dry as an orange. He had never been very wealthy. He had vast possessions somewhere, with an unpronounceable name; but though they were teeming with oil and wine, a veritable garden upon the earth, and filled with a noble population,—tall men and handsome women, ingenious, industrious—yet they returned but a small income comparatively. This is a puzzle to us English. We cannot understand how lands like these, full of fertility, smiling with corn, tilled by a fine race of men, can exist side by side with so singular a deficiency

of hard cash. But such is, and has always been, the fact upon certain parts of the Continent. So the Archduke had very little money. She soon spurred him on to get some, when she rejoined him in Vienna after the rustication in Styria. She soon taught him the way to get money. She opened the eyes of the dull *militaire* to the capabilities for borrowing which a man in his position possesses. Under her directions he used these powers to the farthest extent, and she flung the money about, and carried away Vienna with her this time more violently than ever. The Archduke, at her instigation, built a theatre for her; and here she tried her voice and her figure for the first time on the stage, with a success that was positively a triumph. These southern excitable people worshipped this goddess of beauty and song, and—it must be owned—this goddess of guilt. Sin in its poverty-stricken state is repulsive, disagreeable—it smells of sin—pah! take it away. But sin in the palace, draped with silk and scarlet, adorned with rubies and precious stones, glittering in diamonds, walking upon velvet—clad too in

all the glories of bodily beauty—sin then becomes a goddess, an Astarte ; and as we one and all have a streak of evil in our nature, that streak goes out to meet her, and strews the path before her with flowers and incense ; so they rushed to see her in the theatre, and applauded her to the skies ; and the foolish Archduke, who had begun to be a little alarmed at the cost, which had in part become apparent even to his dull head, was carried away again, and rejoiced, and went about in a glory of joy, in the treasure that he had found. Then the poor fool, who had previously felt secure enough, grew jealous of her, and watched her day and night ; and Carlotta, seeing his folly, fed it day and night, first with love and caresses, then with meetings with other lovers, till his frenzy reached its height, and he was as wax in her fingers, wax that she moulded to her own ends, and those ends were Money.

Our wretchedly feeble moralists make such a fuss about racing and cards ; but especially racing. It is so dreadful, so horrid, so awful. It leads to ruin and to suicide. People lose



their last half-sovereign and cut their throats, by dozens, all through this terrible racing, this betting and gambling on horses. Verily, for one who is ruined by horses and by betting, ten are ruined by women; for their cry is ever the same: Money, money, money. The daughter of the horseleech is a moderate person compared to them; they suck away the very sap of the oldest tree, they undermine it till it falls.

He was sucked as dry as an orange. The money-lenders would advance no more. He could sell nothing—he tried to. Then he applied to the paternal government for a grant to pay his debts. This they listened to in part. They gave him a large sum; he gave it to Carlotta—she spent it. Then he asked for more. A second time he did the same with the grant they made him. The third time they refused him, and he was finished. He actually had not the money with which to pay his personal attendants. In good truth the paternal government—which, now that it had the chance, was going to use it, and put a stop



to his extravagance—was very glad that he could not pay his servants.

They knew what that meant. He must return to his estates in the country; there, if he had no money, he could at least live—his tenants would supply him with every necessary of life. His rivers would supply him with fish; his forests with game. Corn and wine grew in his fields and vineyards. He would be only short of actual cash. But the prospect was as death to the poor Archduke. This excitement, this leading the rout, had become a part of his very existence. He could not leave it—could not stand it. He asked Carlotta to sell her diamonds; that would keep them going another three months at all events.

Carlotta met the proposal with a storm of indignation. Then would she come with him to his house in the country? ‘To that dull hole!’ exclaimed the lady. Not she. He must be a fool to suppose she would.

They lingered on till the crisis came: the theatre was closed. The Archduke’s very valet left him; his friends stood aloof, the

very friends who had cheered him on, whose admiration of *her* had been his ruin. At last there was nothing left but starvation or retreat to his estate. Fool as he was, the Archduke chose the latter. He left for his place, in vain begging Carlotta on his knees to accompany him. She laughed at him. He had to go, and be satisfied with his forests, his rivers, his game and fish, his mansion, and his wife — without this inestimable jewel. Hard fate, poor fellow !

There were no lack of aspirants for Carlotta's favour after his departure ; but she was wary. She was not going to sell her charms too cheaply. These men, who had seen her extravagance, were no fools ; they wanted to have the *éclat* of possessing her, just as they wanted the *éclat* of possessing the finest horse or the latest thing in fashion. But they wanted to get her as cheap as possible. They wanted to bind her down to so much a month. Carlotta turned up her nose. She wanted a fool ; another fool was not to be got in Vienna. You see, even the fools had had their eyes opened by the departure of the Archduke. For

a moment she thought of taking an engagement in one of the Vienna theatres, but gave it up almost immediately. For the opposite faction—the Archduke's cousin's faction—now that the Archduke had fled, would fall upon her with all their might. She should be hissed. No; Vienna was no place for her at present. So she left for Paris. Here she found herself at a discount. Her beauty was superb—her voice excellent; but then, said the manager, she had no reputation. Carlotta replied that she could make a reputation for voice in one night. Madame mistook him; really, ah, well—madame understood the reputation he meant was *à la Boulevard*. In point of fact she was not notorious enough in a guilty sense there—the voice went for nothing, the beauty ditto.

Carlotta smiled; she knew she could soon create *that* reputation; but her difficulty was money. Except diamonds, and these she would not even pawn; she had nothing wherewith to make a sensation. This kind of reputation requires capital to make it, just like any other. On examination she found

her capital to consist of just 500*l*. That would not serve her a month. This was a day or two before Maud left her. Then Carlotta set herself seriously to work to think. The result was this: she was still Horton's wife. He had taken no suit out against her. He was afraid of the exposure; he dreaded it evidently. She would go to England, see him, demand an annuity large enough to keep her from want at all events; she would insist upon it. She would dog him everywhere. If he refused, his only alternative was to enter a suit of divorce; till then she could live as his wife, and he was answerable for her debts. If he entered such a suit, she would oppose it and appear in court in person. The exposure would be tremendous—the revelations would fascinate the public; she should gain a tremendous reputation; at all events, she should find what she wanted—a *rich fool*.

This was her best game. She hastened to carry it into execution. She started for England. She went back to the house in Mayfair, the scene of her triumphs in the long, long past. The servants were struck dumb at the

sight of her. They dared not oppose her, for, as she said, she was still their master's wife. She entered her private room, taking the key from the major-domo, as Horton had done but a few weeks previously. She looked with a smile at the shawl on the chair, the scarf on the floor. At all events, he had felt sufficiently to let these remain. He was not quite steel; she should move him yet. She might even—who knows?—these old men, with all their iron wills, were weak and vain as water. Her spirits rose. She determined to work upon him well. He had gone to Avonbourne; she would follow him—she would throw herself on her knees—call on her father Pierce to help her—shed tears—hold his hand and refuse to let it go. Ha, ha, ha! It would be quite dramatic—quite. Her spirits rose higher still. She ordered the carriage to take her to the station. As she stepped into it, a form—the same that had turned away disappointed when Horton came—ran forward from the corner of the street, gesticulating wildly to the coachman to stop. The footman on the step of the mansion saw him—breathless, but still beckoning—come to

a stand, and then walk as fast as possible after the carriage. The form was muttering to itself, 'I knew it, I knew it! I knew she would come back if only I waited long enough. I will not lose sight of her again!'

It was Francis.







## CHAPTER VI.

IF there is one thing more than another the remembrance of which may fairly give us some hopes of a real progress towards a better state, to some approach to an earthly millennium—if there is one thing which may give us some reasonable belief in the possibility of such a state of things, it is the science of medicine. Of course there still remain cases which are hopelessly incurable—is there not a hospital for incurables? Of course even now death in the end takes away those who, in their person, exhibit the wonderful length to which the art of healing has been carried. But what a marvellous advance, what an almost miraculous progress, the science of medicine has made! We live among such constant proofs of it, it is daily and hourly before our eyes, that we do not realise it. If there is any sign of illness among us,

we say, 'Send for the doctor;' just as we should say, 'Send for the carpenter and mend this chair;' and, unless in extreme cases, with scarcely any more concern. We live in such security, we feel that we have got a body-guard of clever and accomplished men ever on the alert around us, keeping disease at bay—ever ready to rush to our assistance, and armed with unascertained powers. It is so common for people to be cured, that we think nothing of it. Nevertheless there was a time, and that not so very long ago, when these very common simple cases that are now thought nothing of were almost always fatal, from the want of knowledge of the right way of dealing with them. The medical school of that day had its remedy for them; but that remedy was a fallacy. Those lived who had the strength—those died who had it not. This is particularly exemplified in cases where surgery is required. How many thousands of wounded and maimed human creatures have lingered for days and weeks in horrible agony, in the times gone past, simply for want of knowledge on the part of the

surgeon of those times! *Now* what magnificent operations are performed—what truly marvellous skill is exhibited—and crushed and wounded humanity recovered from the very jaws of death! The discovery of vaccination, chloroform, Peruvian bark, quinine—these, and these alone, mark an era in the history of man. But besides these more broad illustrations, there is an advance in a thousand lesser matters—in the general style of practice, in the degree of intelligence *versus* traditional usage now brought to bear. Speaking within certain limits, and these of very wide extent, there is, humanly speaking, hardly anything that modern medical science cannot cure. This is a cheering and grateful thought amid so much that is miserable and discouraging in our days. At least we are slowly gaining an empire over pain: some are even sanguine enough to prophesy that it is the first step towards a victory over death—at least over death from natural decay. The popular impression this progress has made is very conspicuous—it has resulted in an almost child-like faith in the doctor. Send

for the doctor—he can do anything: and certainly it often seems as if he really could do anything. This progress more especially affects the poor. In the old days they had little better chance of escaping, if disease or accident befell them, than the savages in the woods, whose only resource was a charm or a spell or some traditionary herb. Now, good medical advice is within the reach of almost all; and if the death-rate is not materially lowered (other causes contribute to keep it high), yet there must be an immense diminution in the extent of human suffering.

When Noel felt faint, and staggered till he reached the sofa, the waiters and those who had rushed to the spot, took the lead in his place, and they speedily had a surgeon in the place. He had them all out of the room in a twinkling, and sent a piece of paper with a few lines scribbled on it to a certain establishment, from whence, in the course of half an hour, there came two fine and rosy-cheeked women, glowing with health from the midst of disease. They were trained nurses, those blessings of our day.

How shall I describe the sensation that tore poor Noel's heart as he sat in the drawing-room, idle perforce, and listened to Heloise's groans when they brought her back to consciousness and to the feeling of her pain? The man had no idea of what he felt himself. A choking lump rose up in his throat. He dared not walk up and down lest he should disturb her. Disturb her? There was no chance of her going to sleep to be disturbed. To sit still was a torture—almost a hell. Another surgeon came in an hour or two. Noel having recovered from his faintness had given orders that further assistance should be called in; and had himself sent to a man whose name he had heard as high in the profession. He wished to go and fetch this gentleman in person; yet he could not tear himself away. If she died while he was absent? He dared not go. This surgeon who had just come in heard him give the address to the messenger, heard the urgent appeal for haste, and slipped out at another door and intercepted the man. He gave him a note telling the man of reputation that he need not come

till morning—there was no immediate danger at all events. By these means he knew he should gain the favour of the man of reputation, who would be enabled to have a quiet night's rest. The man of reputation would remember him, would throw fees in his way. There really was no need of further advice at present. These two men were good and clever surgeons—they saw in an instant they had got hold of a good paymaster; they were determined to do their best, and they did it. In an hour or so of the most miserable waiting that he had ever experienced in his life, one of them came into the drawing-room and told Noel that there was no present danger. She was not so very badly burnt; it was more the shock to a delicate system that they feared—more the after effects. The lower limbs and extremities had chiefly suffered. Noel shuddered, and his teeth ground together. The feet had entirely escaped, thanks to the fact that she had not taken her boots off having no slippers, you see. The stays had prevented the flames rising higher than her waist—luckily she had taken the body of



her dress off, and there was nothing to carry the fire higher. The burns were in fact superficial, not dangerous—extremely painful even after the use of every appliance, but not dangerous. What they dreaded was the after time, when she began to recover from them. It seemed to them that her body was in a low state—had been so for some time—as if she had been suffering mental trouble that had worried and worn upon her (this cut into Noel like a whip). There was the danger of fever—perhaps the brain might be affected. However, they must hope for the best: she was going on favourably at present, at all events.

This he said in a low voice; Noel listening intently, and barely a word that was not accompanied by groans from the bedroom. The surgeon went back to the bedside. Noel got up and went into his room, and leant his head on his hand, and tried to shut out these low groans. It was in vain; they pierced through the walls, through his hands; nothing could deaden or stop them. Tired as if he had walked twenty miles, exhausted with excitement and anxiety, he lay down on the

bed with his clothes on, and tried to sleep, knowing that he could not see her. But the groans came at regular intervals—now low, now loud, but ever the same; it seemed as if they came with every second breath she drew; so he calculated, comparing them with his own inhalation.

He thrust the pillow against his head—he covered himself with the counterpane. In vain—the low groan penetrated through all; he could not shut it out. He grew hot and feverish, the night was warm—he sat by the window again, and gazed out upon the Thames, as Heloise had done but a little hour before. The great clock-face in the tower at Westminster was still illuminated, showing him the time; the moon had shifted a little, and the shadow of the opposite shore reached half across the river, and the tall shot-towers cast great bridges of darkness sheer from shore to shore. But underneath, close underneath, where the white granite of the embankment was softened into marble by the light, there the moonbeams fell as a silver shower upon the waves, the restless tidal waves. Lifting

his eyes, the calm cold moon met them full, as it had done that dreadful night when he struggled among the weeds with his overturned boat drifting away with the current, and his strength failing him; he remembered the stern resolution of that hour—the reproach he had cast upon himself for his feebleness, his impatience—the stern resolution, if life were only granted him, to return to Avonbourne, to win her by fair means or foul, to tear her away. And he had done so, and now he would have given the whole world to have her back again, sleeping peacefully, safely in that room whose light he had seen again and again from beneath the old oak-tree. No thought of the guilt, the crime into which he had been leading her, came to him then. It was her bodily pain that he thought of only; that bodily pain which drove those low and regular groans through him minute by minute.

If he could but undo the work of the last few hours! If he could but put her back into that pony-carriage from which he had assisted her—almost compelled her to descend! If the

train had only broken down, injured him and spared her, that she might have returned! If he had only sunk that terrible night among the weeds—yes, *sunk* out of sight—and lain unheeded at the bottom, covered with the mud and slime, so that only she could have escaped! He rebelled against Heaven—the very Heaven that had saved him, and cursed it for putting the thought into his mind, the idea of untwisting the spiral coil of the weed around his leg. It should have interfered. Heaven had given him his wish, and *this* was the result. He cursed himself, he hated himself. His hands went twisting ever in and out. The great drops of perspiration stood upon his brow, and the breeze from the river seemed like the hot blast from the mouth of Hades. It might have been that the fire, as people say, had got into his eyes; it might have been the effect of the extraordinary excitement into which he had been thrown or the working of that marvellous unconscious cerebration of which our physiologists tell us—his weary body almost slept as he sat—but his mind, or whatever it was, filled the room

with fire. The red flame shot up the walls—glided up them with a horrible irresistible motion, and as it seemed a silent *swish*, as waves of water might over a smooth sand. The ends of the great tongues of flame curled over and met in a pointed arch in the ceiling overhead, and a stifling wind, a hot blast, filled his nostrils with suffocating heat. The moon turned a dark red, a blood red, and a mist of fire—a glowing yellowy *ignis fatuus* filled the space without, and rolled up the river and blotted out the stars, till it seemed as if the whole world was on fire. A silent fire—no crackle, no hiss; a silent blaze that wrapped everything in its all-enveloping arms, and circled him round on every side. And Heloise stood before him, and he pursued her—she a mass of fire, a pillar of flame!

He rushed after her, and she fled before him; and still he followed and followed, and yelled to her to stop that he might save her; and still she ran on, and instead of screaming, groaned as she went, and great drops of blood fell from her and spotted the path as he ran; and a horror filled him, and he woke.



It was the phantasmagoria of an overwrought and exhausted brain. He woke and found it but just past midnight; and still the groans—ceaseless, regular as the tick of the clock. He could not rest. With a stealthy footstep he went out into the night, and paced the Strand, past the Charing-cross Station and over Westminster-bridge, and still the groans followed him and rang in his ears; and the burden of them was now that he was deserting her—she was suffering unknown agony, and he was afraid to stay and listen to her. Coward!

Then he went back and sat in his room again, and waited; and still the groans went on. Till the moon sank in the west, and the river faded out of sight in the mist, and the pale stars grew fainter and the dawn broke; and still the groans.

At his mockery of a breakfast—groans. At his mockery of a lunch—groans. At his dinner, at his tea—groans. At his supper—groans. The whole night through—groans. Thus it lasted three days and three nights, and neither skill nor science, not even Money, the



all-powerful, could quiet those awful sounds. They could hear it all through the house. They heard it in the smoking-room, and men laid down their pipes and looked grave, and the words of the old, old Book came into their hearts, if it was but for a moment, 'In the midst of life we are in death.' It penetrated into the dining-room as they sat at the table-d'hôte, and the chink of the glasses and the rattle of the knives could not drown it; and the talk was hushed, and the laugh repressed, and the wine flowed less freely. Down even to the very kitchen, where the cooks toiled in the grimy heat; and they turned pale even in that furnace, and said, 'Poor thing, poor thing; may Heaven have mercy on her!' Out even into the street, till those who had business that way hurried by, as by the door of a place where a pestilence dwelt. At last the landlord, good-natured and forbearing as he was, finding his purse suffer, could not repress a complaint to Noel, and Noel hired of him the whole floor upon which Heloise lay, and paid him part in advance. This was in some sense a daily comfort to him, for now

he could go out into the long corridor, all his own, and walk from end to end in his stockings. There he paced to and fro restlessly night and day, day and night; till at last, as the fourth day drew on, the physician, the man of reputation, came to him and whispered a few words; and Noel went back into his bedroom, and held by the very sill of the window to keep himself still—for she, *she* was sinking into a sleep, and from that sleep she must wake to live or—die. There he sat till tired Nature claimed her due of him also; and his head fell heavily on the window-ledge, and his slept. A total unconsciousness, a living death. One of the surgeons stole in and closed the window gently, flinging a light shawl—Heloise's shawl—over his shoulders, and laid a pillow so that his head would roll on it if he moved. He slept heavily in that rude position hour on hour, and when he awoke his first whisper was 'Is she awake?' No; she was not. Then a waking watch began. Would she ever wake? The long, long day darkened into night, and the night became day, and then she woke. And the physician came and told

Noel that she would live; and the strong man's head was lowered in silent gratitude, and the tears—ay, the tears gathered in his eyes, and rolled down his bronzed cheek unnoticed and unfelt.

Then after a while came the time when he was allowed to enter and to see her. He had prepared his mind for a dreadful shock—he had expected to see her looking ghastly. To his extreme surprise she was not. There was no sign on her face of what she had gone through; but the voice—it was so low and faint that he could scarcely hear it. But we are quick to catch the sound of our name uttered by those we love. He bent over her; he knelt at her side. She saw and understood the light in his face; she knew the deep, deep love, the unutterable tenderness, and she smiled, a smile of the deepest joy. He took her hand; her hand showed it more than anything—so thin and shrunken. He caressed it, kissing it gently, as gently as if that kiss could hurt it.

Then came the time when he was not only allowed to see her, but watched by her bedside

hour after hour, sitting still and silent—motionless if she slept. He read to her when she showed impatience and restlessness. It was his turn now, as it had been hers when he was brought into Bourne Manor all maimed by the fall from the cliff. She was propped up now, and could talk for a little while. They were feeding her with stronger meat—the chief difficulty was her extreme weakness. Then the patience, the great patience of this girl won upon the strong man's hardened heart; and all his wild passion was subdued to an almost holy reverence, and he shuddered as he thought of the injury he had done her—not this tangible injury of the burning, but the taking of her from her home to disgrace and infamy. In the silence of the night he determined to make amends, if that might be; to take her back; to restore her pure as he had reft her away. But not yet; he could not surrender her to her friends yet—he could not part with her. He could not call them round her. He argued with himself that she was satisfied—happy with him. They could not nurse her better than these

trained and noble women did. She did not ask for any one except once, and then it was Georgie. But it was only once. In those long, long hours of slow convalescence she did not attempt to think; her whole soul was wrapped up in Noel. She forgot Louis, Carlotta, the miserable avowal of guilt; forgot her own flight, her own position. It was all Noel. She was happy, quietly, peacefully happy with him. And as she grew better, and could leave her bed, and even sit in the drawing-room with him a little while, there returned to him his own fierce love and passion for her, and he asked himself if even now he could let her go. He hardened his heart against his better nature. He gazed at her returning loveliness; he saw the expression in her face, the love in her deep eyes. Could he part with her? Could he let her go? Then again at times, when he remembered her gentle patience, her quiet suffering, his better nature woke up within, and fought within him, and said, Do that which is right; wrong not this pure and innocent creature. Restore her. Ah, that was the question; could he do so now

—could he restore her? This, you see, was the sophistry of his passion. It was a long, long time now since they had left together. Scandal must have been busy with her name. Was it in his power to restore her? Would they not jeer at his story; refuse to believe it? Then he looked at her again, and balanced it in his mind, and suddenly sprang up, and kissed her and said that he loved her better than his own life, and rushed out of the room. He was on his way to Avonbourne in an hour—afraid to wait lest the fit should leave him.

Thus the roads of life of these people were converging together. Thus the threads of the woof of their destiny were about to cross at that old, old house far away by the side of the river. Thither had gone Georgiana to visit Heloise; there had gone Horton to see her; Carlotta had followed Horton, Francis followed her. Now Noel was on his way. Fate was drawing them to meet each other in this strange and mysterious way.





## CHAPTER VII.

GEORGIANA, driven in the pony-carriage towards Bourne Manor from the station, passed along the road within a few feet of where Louis and Noel and Heloise were contending; but they were hidden by a thick hedge. She actually heard loud voices as of quarrelling; and with a horror of scenes of violence which was inherent in her nature told the man to drive as fast as he could. The ponies stepped out swiftly, and tossed their heads as they started away, and Georgiana was carried on past the dearest friend whom she was going to see; whom, if she could but have known what was going forward, she would have rushed to save and support in that terrible hour of trial. She actually passed within a few feet of that cyclone of human passion, and yet knew it not. This is one of the saddest things of all in the life of our poor humanity. With all

our organs—with our delicate sense of touch, sight, and sound; with all our intellect, our power of foresight; with all the appliances of science and invention,—yet our dearest ones may be dying within a mile of us, and not the faintest sign or indication reach us. While we are breakfasting so comfortably and cosily, reading our letters with a languid pleasure, the very hand that traced those lines upon the paper may be trembling with vain struggles to avert the coming doom. And no monition, no presentiment, no secret still voice tells us to be up and doing—rushing to the rescue. Try for one moment to realise what *your* dearest ones are doing at this hour. Only let them be out of sight, and you know no more what is happening to them than you know what is happening to the souls of the dead. There is a wall between you and them—a thick impenetrable veil, through which you cannot see. Will ever science and thought penetrate this thick darkness? Will they ever endow us with keener senses—with acuter sight, with extended hearing? will they ever afford us a means of seeing our dearest ones

at a distance? Let us hope so at least. Surely man, with all his intellect and marvellous powers, is not doomed through ages to remain in the same weak and imperfect state. Just consider what a small and tiny space each of us lives in now; our consciousness of what is happening barely extends beyond the walls of the room in which we are sitting. Compare that limited space with the vastness of the world without, of which we are in absolute ignorance. Nothing gives a greater sense of our own helplessness, the feeble impotence of the wisest and strongest of us, who can see no farther, have no more consciousness of what is proceeding, than can an invalid ever confined to his room.

Georgiana would have given almost a year of her life to have known what was going forward just behind that hedge. But she, the dearest friend, the chief reliance of the tempted and tortured one, drove on unheeding, stopped her ears, actually asked to be driven away faster. And so the evil took its way, and the mischief was done. Georgiana was disappointed at not seeing Heloise at the

station. The man told her she had got out and walked back towards Bourne Manor with Mr. Brandon, who appeared to have some news to tell her. She accepted the explanation in all good faith. She reached Bourne Manor, saw Pierce, who welcomed her in his own genial manner, and asked for Heloise.

Heloise had not returned. Still they thought nothing of it, except in this way. Georgie was a little hurt at the apparent indifference to her visit. Taking off her bonnet she did feel a little resentful. Had she only known, could she have had acuter senses, keener sight, could she have seen Heloise at that very moment standing on the platform at the station, how that resentment would have melted away, and all the womanly sympathies of her nature would have rushed out to the poor fate-driven creature, to the innocent heart, to drag her back from the very verge of ruin! But the thick veil, the dull wall of obscurity was before her senses and theirs.

The day wore on, the evening came on, still no signs of Heloise or Mr. Brandon. Not the slightest thought of any evil entered

the minds of Pierce or Georgiana. Whatever the sharper servants may have conjectured, they kept it to themselves.

The night fell, and still no returning wanderers. Pierce, as indeed he might, grew a shade annoyed—not for himself but for Georgie. ‘They are taking a walk,’ he said; ‘at all events, they might have returned to dinner.’ Tea—a silent one—and no Heloise.

Ten o’clock. Pierce, now alarmed, began to think of measures for discovering them. Surely Heloise could not have gone to Knoylelands? The moment he started that idea Georgiana, now thoroughly alarmed, insisted upon driving over there; and, together with Pierce, she went. No; Mr. Brandon had not returned to Knoylelands since he went to London three weeks before. This was extremely strange; still no thought of evil entered their minds; they grew anxious about an accident. They sent men to scour the woods and footways towards the station and along the river’s bank.

It was past midnight now. They called up the driver to detail the conversation that

took place between Heloise and Noel. He did so. Something in the man's face made Georgiana call him apart and offer him a sovereign. The man pushed it aside. He did not want that, he said; but, lowering his voice, he was afraid Lady Fontenoy had left with Mr. Brandon. Left! what did he mean? In plain words—eloped. Her cheeks tingled, her eyes lit up. Georgiana went as near to *swearing* as ever she had been in her life, and told him not to mention such a thing. The man civilly said he meant no harm, but the goings-on for some time past—

Georgiana walked away in a glow of indignation; and yet somehow— A sickening sense of coming calamity forced itself upon her.

Three o'clock. The men sent to search the roads returned; no trace of the missing pair. By this time the household had talked the matter over, and come to their own conclusion. Pierce looked white and haggard; Georgie was absent, and spoke in monosyllables. They could do nothing till the morning.



At six Georgie sent her maid downstairs to despatch a man to telegraph for Neville.

At midday she sent for the driver again, and asked him what *he* should do. He should go to the station and ask the porters there; that's what he should do. Georgie had the ponies out, and drove herself, without even a boy, to the station; she wanted no one to hear the result. She inquired. Yes; they had seen Lady Fontenoy in the waiting-room. The stationmaster distinctly remembered her being there just before the up express with a gentleman; he saw the gentleman get into the train; did not see my lady get in; but did not see her afterwards. Georgie left the station sick at heart. But why go into the miserable details?

Neville came and made more inquiries, till at last the full significance of the fatal truth dawned upon them. Then it seemed as if this last blow would prostrate Pierce to the very dust. Bravely he struggled against it; then he succumbed. He was taken ill—was confined to his room for weeks. Meantime Neville scoured the country; went to London; set

the private detectives at work ; and failed utterly in discovering a single trace. A keener man than he in such a search had failed in the same attempt. This was Louis and his detective Randal. They were beaten by the very simplicity of the fugitives. They looked at the West-end hotels—no one there. They never dreamt of the commercial hotels in the City.

Neville believed they had gone abroad, and ceased his search. Meantime Georgie nursed Pierce, in so far as he wanted nursing. He was about again now ; but exceedingly weak. The great difficulty was to get him to take an interest in anything ; his mind seemed more listless than his body. His soul had received a blow which stunned it. Thus they were when Horton came down. He grew to have a certain influence over Pierce which did the other good. The silent support of his iron character aided the older man—acted like a tonic. They grew greater friends than they had ever been previously. The subject of Heloise was never mentioned. Horton drew Pierce out with him again, fishing as they had

done so long before. This served to divert the old man's mind a little from the one overwhelming misery; and Horton kept him engaged perpetually. He pretended an interest he did not feel in the history of the county, in the places of antiquarian renown. Pierce, well-informed, was roused up, and accompanied him as guide. Horton kept him constantly occupied. Even this great blow was passing away; a peace—a mournful peace, it is true, but still a peace—was falling over this old house by the river.

Little they dreamt of those converging roads of fate which even then were bringing the actors in the drama of their life, fast as steam and sail could carry them, there to strut their little hour, there to rant their part. Could they have had that keener sight, that acuter hearing, and farther vision we longed for just now, it is possible that they would have fled away, eager to escape the jar of meeting passions—the fiery ordeal that was approaching.

June was over now; July had partly passed; the corn was yellowing before it

bronzed; the convolvulus had taken the place of the dog-rose—Heloise's favourite flower—upon the hedges. The stillness and haze of early autumn were coming. It was near the end of July. Pierce and Horton and Neville had gone to visit an ancient cromlech far away in a dell upon the downs. Georgiana had ridden on horseback over to her own house at Knoylelands. In the afternoon Carlotta came. She drove up in a fly from the station. The footman who opened the door—an ancient servitor of the family—knew her at a glance. Oddly enough, his mind went back some five-and-thirty years in that instant of time.

‘Miss Carlotta,’ he said, and then flushed up and stammered.

‘Ah, John!’ said Carlotta, bent on conciliation, and extending her hand; ‘do you remember pulling me out of the brook when I got in after the watercresses?’

And she laughed her silvery laugh, and smiled on him, and slipped a sovereign into his hand. What could they do, these servants? They knew the whole history of the

woman ; but she was their master's eldest daughter—they dared not disobey her. They took her up-stairs. When she heard they were out, she asked for a room. Carlotta was conscious that eyes were watching her from every available corner as she walked up the broad staircase. She knew that they knew her history, and that they were gazing upon her with curiosity. She walked the slower, and stayed to look out of the staircase window upon the lawn, and turned again as she reached the landing, and looked down upon them calmly without a smile, without a blush, full of her own beauty, not even condescending to defiance. She went through her toilette, she changed her travelling-dress herself. She came down into the sitting-room a glory of beauty and splendour—a very queen—and waited for them thus—for her injured husband, for her disgraced father. She knew better than to put on a brown-holland dress, to heap her head with ashes. It is the tears of these superb and glorious creatures that move men's hearts, not the tears of commonplace dowdies.

So they found her. The servants dared not even tell Pierce, who had arrived. They *could* not tell him. All he knew was, that a visitor was waiting in the drawing-room to see him. He opened the door, he stepped in, he saw, and the power of speech left him. In all her wonderful beauty, a vision of loveliness, she stood before him. He knew not what he felt. His frame was weakened by late illness; he tottered and fell into a chair, gazing at her as he might at a phantom. You see, she had taken him by surprise; he had no time for resentment. She took his hand; she kissed his forehead lightly, and her perfumed breath played with his grey hair; the odour of her scented robes filled his nostrils. The old man had the eye and the heart of an artist. Her beauty—let us tell the truth—cast out the very memory of her misdeeds, at least for that moment. She threw herself on her knees beside him; she flung her arms around him.

‘Father,’ she said softly, pleadingly; ‘father, have mercy on me!’

The simple words went right to their



mark. You see, she was so beautiful. Had they come from a commonplace woman, their effect would have been nil. He have mercy on her! He, an old and weakened man, who had begun to ask himself of late whether or no even his highest philosophy (which was to him as religion is to others) was not a dream of the mind, a delusion—who had begun to ask himself if he was even competent to be the judge of right and wrong for himself—he have mercy on her! The old man's heart, you see, had been weakened by repeated blows; there was no anger left in it. 'Father, have mercy on me!' These simple words had left his own lips many times lately in this last great trouble with Heloise; thus he had cried, in the bitterness of his spirit, to that great God whom he worshipped.

Suddenly the old man burst into tears, and his trembling hand fell on her shoulder. Carlotta was unprepared for this. For bitter words, for revilings, for sharp blows of the tongue: for these she was prepared. For cold sneers, for the indifferent refusal to see her: this she had expected. But this—it did not

affect her, it did not work upon her hardened heart. For a second it puzzled her. Then she put her arm round his neck, and drew down his head till it rested on her own lovely bust, and whispered low words of deep affection. So it came about that the sinner consoled the sinner against.

Pierce kissed her when he recovered himself a little; he kissed her twice, and smiled at her faintly; he let his hand glide over the raven glossy hair, and looked at her fondly. After all, she was his daughter, his eldest daughter; and she was a noble woman to look at—a daughter any man might be proud of.

‘My child,’ he said, speaking to her as he would have done five-and-thirty years before.

‘I have come back to you, father,’ she said, casting her eyes down meekly. He accepted her as the returned prodigal; he asked no questions; he welcomed her. The man was too good, too kind for this world of ours. She saw her advantage and pursued it relentlessly. She knelt at his knee and poured into his ear a tale of deception and delusion, a tale of penitence and contrition. Always she

cast the blame upon Louis; he had been the bane of her life. Pierce, remembering and resenting Louis's desertion of Heloise, believed this. In a measure it was true. Always she spoke of Horton with tenderest regret. She did not regret her own misery, her own disgrace; it was not herself she thought of, it was always him. For him she had dared *this*—dared the sneer and the finger of scorn—dared even to face her justly incensed father. For him—for Horton. Surely Pierce would aid her, he would help her into the strait and narrow path again. She could not hope, she said, to become his wife again, to live with him, to share his society. But she did hope that he would not take from her the name of his wife (she knew there was no danger of such proceedings, unless forced on by herself); she did rely on Pierce's offices to procure her a small share of his bounty, that she might live in quietness away from the world (away from the world!).

Pierce interrupted her. There was no need of her asking for that; he would support her; she should not want; he had plenty.

But he applauded her desire to seek Horton's forgiveness; gladly he promised his aid; he would intercede for her; he would go at once.

'Let no one come to me,' said Carlotta, 'till—till *he* comes.'

She hung her head. Pierce kissed her. No one should enter the room. Then he sought Horton, and found him in the library, whither he had gone to while away an hour before dinner. Pierce paused when he saw him. The task seemed easy and light from a distance; now that he looked into the steel-grey eyes of this man of iron, his heart failed him; he hesitated; his lips would not frame the opening words. But he had promised—he *would* do it, and he did. Horton listened in utter amazement; well he might. It was, indeed, a strange sight. The poor and aged father, brought down to the very verge of the grave by his daughters' misdeeds, urging earnestly, eloquently, that the deepest sinner, the most degraded of them all, might be spared, might be restored to some little position of womanly dignity.

Horton gazed first with amazement; then he listened with incredulity. He could not conceive the possibility of it at first. After a while, as he marked the trembling eagerness of the old man, he grew to feel that it was true—that the father was really pleading for the evil woman whom he called his daughter. Then there rose up in his heart a bitter hatred—a red-hot glow of indignation, not against the unfortunate man, but against that degraded and horribly-unnatural creature who had brought the grey hairs of her parent to this wretched office. All the strength of his mind rose up in a fiery rage—a bitter and unutterable loathing of the creature whom once he had strained to his heart in fondest, most fatuous admiration. She had deceived him into this, wheedled him, melted him with crocodile tears, stroked him down with her white hands, made him submissive to her will. Out of respect to Pierce he listened patiently, he even nodded his head; but when he paused, he said quietly,

‘She is here, then?’

Pierce said she was.

‘Take me to her,’ he said, in a voice so low and gentle as to deceive Pierce, who thought that he had gained his point.

Then he led him to the drawing-room, and left him there, to pace the library and wait for the result.

Carlotta was standing by the window when he entered. The blaze of the man’s eyes—the fierce light that shot from under the bent eyebrows—the frown upon the forehead—the quick step—the outstretched hand: these told her in an instant what to expect. He came closer to her; he gazed her in the eyes, as if the steel-blue of his would drive her down to crouch at his feet. She did nothing of the kind. She stood and faced him as calm as he was passionate, unmoved even by the consciousness of the clenched hand, that might strike her to the earth. She met his eyes fully with her own. His breath came short and thick; he gasped for utterance. Her breast rose and fell gently, regularly. She blenched not one step. He was astounded, in spite of himself, by the calm, the unbounded audacity



of the woman. It forced an admiration out of him even then.

‘Carlotta,’ he hissed at last—‘devil, be gone!’

‘Horton,’ she said calmly.

But his lips once opened, he poured upon her all the scorn, all the wrath of his passion. All the years of his suffering and silence—all the suppressed misery of those years and years—rushed out from his mouth, till even she, yes, *she*, the heart of adamant, quailed before him, and trembled, for never before had she known the resistless strength of man’s passion. His hands held her arms as in a vice; but she did not feel the pain. Her soul for one instant saw its own blackness, its own ineffable infamy, and fled horror-struck at the sight. His violence forced away the thick veil of her vanity and her selfishness; he compelled her to see herself. Gradually she sank before him; her knees touched the carpet; he towered over her, still holding her arms, pouring upon her the fiery storm of his just and Rhadamanthine wrath. Had he struck her it would have been different; she

fully expected that when he came striding towards her. Then she would have taunted and sneered at him, and bared her breast, and dared him to kill her, and laughed in his face. But this—this was something beyond her experience—what she had never dreamt of as possible. For he tore away the veil of her vanity and intense selfishness, and for one brief minute he filled her with shame. Pierce pacing the library waited till he grew impatient; then he came out into the passage—he heard loud voices—he could stay no longer. He opened the door; he saw her at Horton's feet, crouching like a beaten hound. He rushed forward; he, too, fell on his knees. Seizing Horton's arm, he begged him, prayed him, conjured him, all injured as he was, to forgive; and Horton paused and looked from one to the other, a dull wonder even then filling his mind. Then he looked at Carlotta's drooping head, and let go her arm, and stepped back; but she clung to his knees, and fell on the floor at his feet, and a passion of sobs, real sobs, forced from her by the violence of her excitement, shook her form. Pierce, rising,

took Horton by the shoulders, and spoke to him hurriedly and low, and the burden of his words was ever the same: that he had been wronged, cruelly wronged; but it was nobler to forgive. And Horton, his chest heaving with passion, looked from one to the other, from the wretched creature grovelling at his feet to the trembling old man hanging upon his lips. And a deep compassion, a pitiful sympathy for Pierce rose up in his heart, and he took Pierce's hand and bowed his head, and said in a low voice hastily, 'As you will, as you will.' Then with Pierce he raised up Carlotta, and placed her on the sofa; and they sat one on each side of her, the injured husband and the still more injured father, and consoled her, drying her tears, supporting her form, till the storm of unwonted passion passed away, and they helped her gently up-stairs to her room, and left her there.

As the door closed behind her Horton held out his hand, and took Pierce's and pressed it significantly, and they parted to sweep away the traces of the storm before they met again at dinner.



## CHAPTER VIII.

RIDING over to Knoylelands, Georgiana could not help contrasting the real state of things with that which she had planned with Neville when they first entered upon their new life, after the novel ceremony of their marriage, or rather contract. The very primary ground of that contract, the foundation upon which it was all built, was the deed of partnership, by which she contributed her 800 acres and her house, and Neville gave his 20,000*l.* as the capital to work it. They were to pass a few weeks upon the Continent; then they were to return and to spend the rest of their lives together in that seclusion, studying, and enjoying each other's society within easy reach of her friend Heloise. This was a fair and pleasant prospect, and, as it had seemed at the time, one easy of realisation. Is it not often

rather the difficulties that arise in ourselves, changes of our own mental drift, that cause the *dispose* to be so entirely different from the *propose*, quite as much as the interference of circumstances over which we have no control? There had been no absolute obstacle to prevent the realisation of this very modest ideal. The difficulties had arisen in themselves, in the drift of their own minds.

Neville had wearied of her—she did not disguise the fact from herself—he had, in a manner at least, wearied of her during that time upon the Continent. He did not say so, he did not even imply as much, but she felt it. She knew what his irritation and restlessness meant. She was glad when, on returning to England, society encircled them in its folds, and gave him an opportunity of escaping from the dull bonds that had become irksome to him, of escaping from her.

This woman loved in a noble manner. It is questionable if she could have given up Neville, even for his own good, totally and for ever, not even to save him from *ennui*; but she had a broad and liberal mind; she ab-

solved him from any unfaithfulness; she did not even charge him with a lack of affection; she put the difficulty down to its true cause—the total disruption of all his old habits. She did not wish him ever to return to these old habits again. The best thing was obviously plenty of society—amusement. Gladly she saw him going about, even to Ascot and the betting-ring. It would rouse him, his latent powers would come to the surface; in time he would return to her. Then she herself became involved in the vortex of fashion. So it was that neither of them ever proposed the carrying into execution the original plan of settling down at Knoylelands. Till, at last, Georgiana, tired of fashion and excitement, weary of waiting for the return of that love which never came, thought of Heloise, and longed for the old happy life at Avonbourne. She came, to find Heloise gone—more sin, more misery, less faith than ever in her own kind. But out of this very sin and misery grew up a good and a joy to her. She telegraphed for Neville. He came. He too was tired of fashion and excitement; a mind of his



description could not be satisfied long with the artificial pabulum of the betting-ring. The inevitable reaction set in with him also. He came to unconsciously compare the women, ay and the men too, with whom he associated with Georgie, and she shone out as gold placed beside dull brass and lead. The old, old love awakened in his heart. Yet he hesitated to go back to her.

Habit is strong; besides there was, perhaps, a little reluctance to tacitly own himself in the wrong. He lingered on in those ways, though his heart was not in them. He might have lingered on much longer had it not been for Georgiana's telegram; he came at once. He did his best to discover Heloise, and when he failed he came back to Avonbourne and stayed there; he showed no disposition to leave her side again. All the woman awoke in her as she became gradually aware that he did not want to leave her. She could not help it; the warmth of her love poured itself out upon him. She said nothing—it was all very quiet and undemonstrative; but she made him feel that he was welcome, that by-gones were by-

gones, that she did not reproach him, that her arms were open to him.

In the weeks they lived at Bourne Manor, while Georgiana nursed Pierce, and while Heloise, all unknown to them, was lying in agony, in that time a perfect understanding grew up between them. No words were spoken, but they knew full well each of them that they had met to part no more. So Georgiana, riding over to Knoylelands out of curiosity and to amuse herself while the gentlemen visited the ancient cromlech—a cromlech which she had seen many times—was in a degree happy. The thoughts of the past that came over her rolled away, and left her rejoicing in the hope of the future. They should yet come to Knoylelands, she and Neville, and live in perfect accord, with a quiet but deep joy in each other. Why should they not go there at once? They could go over daily and see poor old Pierce. She would go over the house and see if any alterations required to be made. She did so; she spent the best part of the day laying out her plans, making inventories of things she should have

done here—new furniture that she should have brought in there—little alterations to be made in a third place. But the greatest joy of all was arranging Neville's study, his own private especial room, where he could sit in his own particular chair, at his own particular table, smothered in literary litter of books and paper, and so forth, undisturbed and happy. He had himself selected the room when he was living there before their marriage. It was not large, but very lofty, with a window to the south-west; a deep embrasure, where he could sit and muse in the sunset, and look up from his book to gaze on the glorious painting of the clouds.

Georgiana sat down in this window-seat, and looked out thoughtfully upon the green meadows, swelling on slowly into an upland, crowned with the golden wheat, and beyond that the outline of the hills which closed in Avonbourne. Then she set to work with her pocket-book to note down the things she must get and the alterations she must make. It had been a bedroom; the bed must be taken away, the fireplace must be enlarged, new

carpets—Neville was particularly fond of thick carpets, that deadened the sound of the footsteps, soft as if walking upon moss. She knew his favourite picture—it was a Rembrandt in the dining-room; that must be moved up here, and hung yonder, just opposite where his writing-table must be placed, and the table must be put where the light was not strong. It must be a heavy oak table—one that would not jar or quiver as he wrote; one that would bear thick tomes without tilting. He would like a lamp swung from the ceiling, so that the light might fall from above, it was much better for the eyes; she made an inventory of all things, even to a footstool for his feet.

By this time it was afternoon, and she mounted her horse to return. She rode over the downs, and thus it was that from the ridge she could see the old house at Avonbourne long before she came to it. Heloise rushed into her mind almost as a reproach; she had been so happy, and her friend—Heloise? Not even for one moment did a detestation of the guilt disturb her love, nor indeed would she ever admit that Heloise was morally guilty.

She had been over-persuaded; even now it was just possible that her instinctive purity had saved her from utter and irretrievable ruin. Never would she give up hope—never cease to believe in Heloise. She reproached herself with the plans for her own happiness, in which she had lost all thought of her friend. She grew thoughtful and sad as the horse, left to himself, paced slowly along the smooth and velvet turf of the hills. The memory of Heloise brought up a train of thought which of late had begun to work in her mind. Already she had doubted her mission. *Now* there came a doubt of the very possibility of progress. Could the human being progress? Inventions and mechanics could, and did; see the steam-engine and the telegraph. But was the man who drove that steam-engine, or the man who rode at his ease in the first-class carriage behind it, in any way really superior to or improved upon his ancestors, who roamed, clad in the skins of beasts and spear in hand, over these very downs? Under the thin crust of civilisation were they not subject to the same passions; did they not under greater or



less disguise engage in the same guilt and corruption? And women—her own sex—were they capable of improvement; was it possible to change their nature? After all, it might be that the laws and the customs which had grown up out of the experience of thousands of years might be as nearly adjusted to the true relationship of the sexes as any human machinery could be. She had lost her dogmatic assertion, her unvarying consistency; she had lost her belief in her own arguments. The ground seemed to fall away so beneath her own feet. Her own case—with all her ingenuity, with all her inspiration, had not she failed? It was not the method of their marriage that had brought Neville back to her again. It had had no more effect than as if it had been the most ordinary and customary process. To a certain degree, Georgiana felt humbled in her own estimation—sad, and with less faith in herself as she reëntered Bourne Manor: had not even Heloise— But that was too painful to dwell upon.

If so pure and divine a nature as Heloise's gave way to guilt, what could be expected of



coarser and ruder creatures? There might be many excuses for them.

Georgiana had been meantime the subject of much anxious conversation between Pierce and Horton. They could not tell how she would meet Carlotta. They knew her theories, and her rather violent and decided character of old ; they did not know the change that had been going on within her. They called in Neville. It was a deep humiliation to Pierce to talk of his own daughter's deeds to Neville ; yet it was necessary, and in some degree palliated by the other's acquaintance with the facts. Neville voluntarily promised his aid to effect at least an apparent friendliness ; an absence of outward scorn, if not an actual pleasantness. He did not anticipate, he said, that there would be much difficulty. So it was that when she returned and went up to her room, Horton the brother, and Neville the husband, went up and saw her. Georgiana, saddened and humiliated in her own estimation by her late thoughts, heard them with deep surprise indeed, but with no retort. God forbid, she said at last, that she should in any

way presume to set herself in the place of a judge ; still less to prevent the return of an erring person. Nothing on her part should indicate in the slightest degree that she was even acquainted with Carlotta's history. To tell the truth it was with no little curiosity that Georgiana entered the dining-room, and shook hands with Carlotta.

It was a strange and unparalleled dinner-party. The father sat by his lately-recovered daughter ; the husband on the other side of his wife ; next to Horton, Georgiana ; beside her, Neville. While there was anything to eat it went smoothly enough ; between the courses there was an awkward pause. The father could not start a conversation ; his mind, heavily burdened, refused to rise on the light waves of talk. The husband was silent and meditative. Neville gallantly did his best ; he started at least twenty different ideas ; Georgiana seconded him ; but one and all fell flat. A dulness, an inevitable silence reigned. Strangely enough, it was the very person who had caused this constraint who now rose to the occasion and removed it. When she left Pierce

and Horton, and retired to her own private room, the very vigour of her physical frame had already begun to renovate her mental condition. This vigour—this intense life—utterly forbade her ever remaining long in a downcast condition. She washed; she refreshed herself; removed all traces of her late disorder. There was still a quarter of an hour to think before dinner. Deliberately she sat herself down to do so. She reviewed her position. She had gained Pierce on her side, first; that was an immense advantage. Moreover, she had made a discovery. Till this day she had had no idea that Pierce was a peer, that he had succeeded to large estates, that he was in fact wealthy. There was much to be made out of him by skilful manœuvering. She had gone even further: she had secured Horton. He had reviled her, he had humiliated her; but in the end he had given way. By delicate treatment she might yet succeed, if not in a total restitution, at least in occupying a good position as far as cash was concerned. It would go hard with her if she did not improve these advantages, and work upon

the natures of these men to her own profit. To her own profit. For the momentary humiliation, the flush of shame, had passed away as quickly as it came, leaving no impression upon her mind. She smiled as she thought of it; yes, absolutely smiled at herself; a smile that quickly died away into a sneer at the weakness of these men, the ease with which she had wound them round her fingers. Then she looked in the glass, and swelled with a proud triumph, and admired her own beauty; and set her foot firm, and inwardly resolved to rule the roast yet. Such was the indomitable strength of her mind, the almost total absence of moral consciousness, the intense physical energy of the woman. There was something absolutely grand and yet repulsive in the very audacity, the cool unparalleled effrontery of this sin-stained gorgeous creature daring to present herself at the very door of this mansion; and now sailing down to dinner in full dress, calm, lovely, magnificent, with the port of a queen. With one jewelled hand lightly laid on Pierce's arm she swept to the head of the table—her place by

right as eldest daughter—and seated herself there, rustling in silk, odorous with delicate perfume, glowing with tropical beauty. Shall truth be confessed? Georgiana grew *jealous* of her.

Neville's eyes were on her constantly. He could not withdraw them. The flashing Southern eyes, the regular features, the noble well-poised head, the splendid bust, the dazzling whiteness of the skin, they fascinated him. Her slightest motion was grace; her voice low and sweet—a beautiful thing in woman. An irresistible influence seemed to surround her, to move with her. Georgiana marked his gaze, and grew jealous. She, the reformer, the woman of mind, grew jealous of this creature, this mere woman of matter:

‘It is from matter that light streams and flows,  
And light clothes matter in its rarest hues.’

The very materialism of her nature, the firm full organs, seemed to emit a magical radiation, a subtle ether that stole into the very hearts of men. And Georgiana, proof against this attraction herself, saw and recognised its power over the opposite sex; and hated her,



as far as such a woman could hate who tried all the while to subdue her rising passion. Even Pierce brightened and smiled when Carlotta addressed him ; even Horton could not refrain a glance occasionally at her. Georgiana verily believed that for the moment at least he, the injured husband, was proud of his wife. How weak these men were ! So it was that Carlotta, whose presence was the cause of the restraint, in a little while, by sheer dint of her liveliness, overcame and conquered ; at least she overcame the men ; and there ensued an ease—the stiffness vanished—the conversation grew lively. And she actually conversed, and laughed, and showed her beautiful white teeth ; positively laughed, as Georgiana said to herself. This *creature* dared to laugh. O Georgie, where is your own self-humiliation now ; where is your readiness to welcome back the sinful to the path of virtue ? A black drop of ill-humour was gathering in her heart. Of course she did not show it ; she joined in the laugh. The men encouraged the smile ; the jest began to circulate—absolutely jesting, said Georgiana, at the table of the man she had



disgraced for ever. By the time the wine arrived a Lethe of oblivion of the past seemed to have fallen over the company; Georgiana only excepted. Poor old Pierce, to whom Carlotta paid the most attention, brightened up, and became genial, almost happy. Horton unbent and relaxed the severity of his features. Neville was lively and talkative. With one consent the gentlemen refused to remain over their wine, but accompanied the ladies to the drawing-room at once. This was a great relief to Georgiana. She had dreaded being left alone with Her. She had even an inward inkling that this creature was quietly, and in her own heart, enjoying her triumph, gibing at the only one who could see through her, and yet was powerless; and this was the fact. This one drop of honey was added to the sweet cup of Carlotta's triumph, in the thought that one of her own sex was there jealous, annoyed, half wretched. She knew that Georgie saw through her and despised her—that increased the pleasure; for it increased Georgie's annoyance.

In the drawing-room, Neville, judging by

the mellowness of her voice, begged her to sing. And she did sing, as only such a woman can. Her voice floated up and filled the room, and her throat gurgled and trilled with those delicious indescribable sounds which the Opera calls singing, and which is rather an inarticulate attempt on the part of a divine being, deprived of speech, to express the feelings of its soul. In that music they forgot her past, they dwelt in her present only. Pierce was lulled, Horton soothed, Neville intoxicated. Even Georgiana gave way to this—she could not resist it. The very love of truth, the very justice of her mind, compelled her to applaud with the rest; for it was indeed singing. Then she played, and the marvellous suppleness of the white taper fingers filled them with wonder; and Georgie, herself a fine musician and passionately fond of the art, moved up nearer and watched her. The woman was lost now in the genius, the sinner was out of sight; the inspiration alone remained. The charm of it was her own self-possession, the calmness of her face, the ease and grace of her motions. There was no

strain, no feverish anxiety, no hesitation; the notes flew beneath her touch, as if she were sowing pearls of sound. Once there they could not let her move. They made her sing and play, alternately, the whole evening through. There were intervals of course: intervals in which she turned upon them the full glow of her beauty. Intervals in which the ready wit, the amusing anecdotes, the lively sparkle of her talk enchanted them almost as much as the music had done. Georgiana was studying her now. The envy and jealousy had departed since the singing and the playing. She could not feel jealous of a genius: that was no part of her nature. She had nothing but admiration, worship for genius. It was only when the woman in her was roused that the weakness of the sex affected her. She could not yet *like* her; she could not even prevail upon herself to address her familiarly: but she studied her. And the more she dwelt upon her the more her wonder grew. Carlotta was sketching the continental manners now for Pierce's amusement. The sparkle of her wit lit up her de-

scriptions like the sunlight upon the falling spray of a fountain. Her spirits had risen now to the highest pitch. She saw that her success was secured; she saw that Pierce was in the hollow of her hand; she felt that Horton was won over. She marked Neville's evident admiration. His face acted to her as a mirror. She watched it. In it she could see her progress reflected; could tell in an instant that she had struck a right chord, or that her hand was approaching a wrong one. Thus it was that she became dimly conscious that something was wrong with Heloise. Her quick wit had already noticed that no allusion was made to her: she hazarded a hint—she did not even mention the name—she hinted at something in connection with Heloise, and she saw in an instant that she was treading upon dangerous ground. A shade passed over Neville's face—that was her mirror. Like a sensitive horse she obeyed the slightest indication. Away she rattled again, steering away from the rock with ease. It must be remembered that Carlotta had had no connection with any one in Eng-

land for a length of time ; that she had only just returned from the Continent, and had had no intimation either of Pierce's being a peer or of Heloise's elopement. But she felt that something was wrong.

The evening was gone before they were aware of it. Time had passed unnoticed. Even Georgiana could not refuse a certain cordiality in the pressure of her hand, the tone of her voice. Carlotta sailed upstairs in triumph ; and glancing back caught Neville watching her, and flashed on him the brilliance of her eyes. In her room she inquired of the maid who had been sent to attend to her of Heloise, and soon learnt the truth. No words can picture the intense delight, the thrill of malignant triumph that shot through her. A flush mounted to her cheeks, a flash left her eyes. *She*—the pure, the innocent—had fallen at last. The much-adored idol was down, with its face in the dust. The whole woman swelled and enlarged. There arose in her a still deeper enjoyment in her own existence, a fulness of life ; she panted with very accession of vigour. He-

loise, the innocent, had fallen, was degraded. Herself, the gorgeous sinner, was enthroned in her place. Pierce and Horton and Neville were all doing homage at her feet: even this other woman, Georgiana, was forced to be civil and polite. She was master of the house. Her lips set firmly, her teeth met in a stern resolve to turn that success to the fullest advantage she could work out of it. She had them all in her net. And Heloise, the innocent, was fallen. The pure idol was down in the dust. Ha, ha, ha!







## CHAPTER IX.

THE charm of Carlotta's manner did not evaporate with the daylight. But by this time she had had plenty of opportunity to study the scene of action, and to be prepared with her part accordingly. She was more subdued by daylight. She did not flash her beauty and her magic so much in their faces. Her theory was that that did very well in the evening, when men wished to be amused ; in the middle of the day it was better not to be too gorgeous. Therefore she dressed quieter. She had only brought a single port-manteau with her ; in that there were only a few dresses, barely enough for the changes demanded by civilisation ; yet somehow she contrived to make a variety, as only a clever woman can, out of these slender materials. Meantime she lost no time in telegraphing to London for some of her luggage left at an

hotel. Her manner corresponded with her dress. She wished to show that she was equal to ordinary life ; that she could bear her part in every-day existence as well as take the lead and become the centre of admiration in the hour of amusement. At first she had had thoughts of depending entirely upon her powers of dazzling, but second thoughts bore down the balance in favour of an attempt to enter into their daily life. In this she succeeded as well as she had done on her first arrival. Towards Pierce her demeanour was one of the deepest reverence and affection. She was to him the dutiful daughter, ever ready to fall in with his suggestions, to adopt his merest hints, waiting upon his eye-glance with ever-ready wit. So she wound herself into the heart of the old man, and became to him almost a necessary part of his daily life, and all this in the course of one short week. It was her beauty. The words, the glances, the tone of her voice, the graceful movement,—it was these that lent so strong a power to her smallest effort. She had so much attention. They could not but note her merest word,

her merest act. Then those acts, those words, were winged with grace and soft delicious languor. A plain woman might have striven for years in vain: she might have said precisely the same words, done precisely the same things, put her whole heart into the labour, and yet failed utterly, simply because, in the first place, she could not get the attention paid to her, and because her words and acts were not emphasised by loveliness. For which of us could not persuade another person to our will if only that other person would *listen* to us carefully, attentively, and try to realise the complete meaning of our language, and not fly off at a tangent every five minutes? If they would only try to follow out the sequence of our thought, if they would cordially try to see things as we saw them, how speedily we should carry them away with us! This was how Carlotta succeeded. Her beauty obtained for her this very attention, this silent and appreciative auditory; hence she easily swayed them to her purpose. To Georgiana she was deferential in the extreme, disarming her by very humility. But her

cleverest stroke was with Neville. She refused to flirt with him. Not that Neville, under the very eyes of his wife, would have plunged into a downright flirtation—such a flirtation as his late residence among the fashionables had taught him was permissible, and really the very salt of society—but he was ready to admire her to the very top of her bent. Carlotta denied herself this pleasure; she refused to let him admire her; she kept him coldly at a distance. This was to disarm Georgiana, and it most effectually attained the object. There even grew up to some small extent a cordiality between them—the small amenities of daily life were exchanged without grudging upon the part of Georgiana. Carlotta cared for nothing more; all she wanted was a clear field in which to use her powers unchecked upon Pierce and Horton. To Horton she was respectful. No other word can describe her conduct. She did not attempt to be even distantly affectionate; to remind him by any covert advance on her part that he was the lawful possessor of her charms. She did not even sit near him, and she carefully

avoided being in a room alone with him. Her idea was to ignore all that had passed, to act and behave as if they were good friends, but nothing more. Now this was very clever, for Horton was a man who, above all other things, hated demonstration, hated all gushing and sentiment. These things were repulsive to his practical nature. He feared in his secret heart that now he had forgiven her she would attempt to show her gratitude, and that he should have to submit to scenes. He soon found he should have to do nothing of the kind. He appreciated her good taste, and it went farther with him than any other method could have done. This man had been deeply sinned against; he had bitterly resented it; but his was not a vindictive spirit. He really thought that Carlotta had repented; that she had seen the miserable guilt of her life, and was sincerely desirous of amendment. He was not a religious man; far from it. He attended church, it is true, but merely as a matter of form; he had no heart in the service. Too much a business man all his life; too much accustomed to exact reasoning, to



the results of precise calculation to accept unquestioningly the broad statements and the lax logic of the pulpit,—he was at the same time rigidly just, rigidly truthful, sincere, equitable, and even kind after his first anger was over. He was far more forgiving than many of the most pious Christians would have been. He recalled his own experience of life; he recalled the many temptations that had been thrown in her way. To some degree he cast blame upon himself. He had left her too much to her own devices, instead of interfering, stepping in, and staying her downward progress when she first began; he had stood proudly aloof till she fell, and then he had turned upon her savagely. He admitted to himself that he had done wrong in this; that he had not fulfilled his duty as a husband; he had got so far as this—he saw no absolute obstacle to her return to her old position. They could never, of course, be as they had been to each other. There must always be a distance between them—a certain degree of mistrust and coldness. But there was no reason that she should not retain her



name, her title; that she should not live according to that position—always a little toned down and quieted. He would not allow of the former extravagance—he should not permit her to be subjected to the same temptations. A certain amount of watch must be kept over her surroundings. He had got as far as this in his inward resolutions towards her. The saddest and bitterest part of it all was that he blamed himself in a point over which he had no control. No children had resulted from their union. He had always bitterly regretted this. The man of millions, the possessor of untold wealth, had no son, no child, to fondle upon his knee, whom he could watch with pride developing into manhood. Had they had children, he said to himself, Carlotta would have remained at his side; the mother would have retained her pure. When he remembered this he could not so deeply blame her. He knew that she had had an illegitimate child; he knew also (what Noel did not) that it had been stillborn. The thought of that very thing which had driven Heloise into guilt, into a paroxysm of irrepressible agony, rage,

and passion,—this very thought cooled the husband's resentment. He could understand the deep longing for offspring; he had felt it. The man was no feeble, narrow-minded bigot, no weak idealist of self; he could pardon others at his own expense; and out of this her deepest guilt—her blackest crime—arose Carlotta's pardon. He forgave her. He did not love her again; he did not even feel the slightest affection towards her; he hardly overcame the natural repulsion he had felt for her so long; but he forgave her; he would in no wise punish her. Had all these resolves originated in Horton's own mind unprompted, he would have been worthy of the name of a great and noble man. As it was, it was no light thing. But behind it there was the subtle influence of Carlotta's beauty, the magic of her grace. Would he have thus pardoned a plainer woman? Even as it was, he had to pass through a bitter trial, a severe strain upon his resolution. It came in this way.

Louis was of course only stunned by Noel's blow. Foreseeing it, he had stepped partly

backwards, as the prize-fighters do, and thus he had received only a portion of the impetus; but that was enough to cast him headlong into the osiers and the reeds. Randal, the private spy, fled at the sight; but so soon as he was aware that Noel was not pursuing him he stopped, watched Noel and Heloise carefully out of sight, and then returned to his employer, whom he found sitting on the ground in a half-dazed state, and stained with blood from his mouth. With the aid of a little brandy from his pocket-flask, Randal got him round, and then dipping his handkerchief in the pool close by, washed away the traces of the blow; except that on the lower lip, just in the centre, there was a cut, the scar of which must show till the grave hid it. That cut, singularly enough, was almost in the exact spot where Heloise had been marked by the force of her husband's arm. Louis, still half dazed, his head giddy, his limbs tottering, was led by his spy back to the Sun Inn, where they had been lodging for some little time. It was not till the next morning that Louis entirely recovered him-

self; and then his rage rose to a blasphemous pitch, mingled with a demoniacal joy at the news which Randal brought in—that Heloise was gone, and gone with Noel. His lip pained him very much, and impatient of pain, as such cowardly natures are, he cursed and raved and stamped about the small apartment in a perfect fury of hatred, burning for revenge. His first idea was to summon Noel before the justices of the peace for that division—the very bench on which Pierce sat. He laughed at the thought of the consternation, the scandal it would cause, the exposure and the misery and wretchedness it would bring upon the family. But on second thoughts he changed his plans. He had come down to Avonbourne, and taken up his residence at the ruinous old inn under the chestnut-tree, with the express purpose of watching Heloise, of detecting her in too familiar intercourse with Noel; and for that purpose he had brought with him a spy and witness, the object being to obtain a divorce from the hated yoke of marriage. He had gathered together a good deal of information from the labourers of the place, who had

so frequently seen Lady Fontenoy and Mr. Brandon together, but nothing that would serve his purpose; and it so happened that the very time he came down was the time that Noel left Heloise, vowing never to see her again. So that it was not till that fatal morning that he saw them together, and then came upon them unexpectedly, and facilitated the very catastrophe he most of all desired. She had gone with Noel, eloped with the very man who had felled him to the earth. His better course by far was to pursue his original intention—to seek for a divorce, laying heavy damages upon Noel. He would then have a bitter revenge upon him, upon her, and upon the family. To summon Noel, though it might make an exposure, would only place him in a ridiculous light, as the husband who had fainted, who had been knocked down; and Louis, who was sensitively vain, shrank from the sneers of men. Success in a divorce suit, with heavy damages on Brandon, would turn the scales quite the other way; it would kill three birds with one stone: it would mulct Noel, make him pay heavily for that scar on



the lip; it would disgrace the family; it would fix an irremovable stain upon Heloise. His best course would be to follow up the eloped pair, to get evidence of their residence at hotels, and so forth.

Off he went, leaving Randal to watch Avon-bourne, and communicate the course of events to him. He first endeavoured to trace Heloise, but utterly failed in that. Then he went to his lawyer, and instructed him to open a case. The lawyer, an old friend of his father's, a man of ability and an estimable character, who had watched the progress of the son with sorrow and anger, presented the most determined opposition. This only inflamed Louis the more, till he declared he would seek other professional assistance. Gently, very gently, but firmly, the solicitor reminded him that he was deeply in debt, and in point of fact completely in his power. Louis flamed up, showered the most abusive epithets upon him, and declared he would have his way if he were ruined ten times over. Finally, seeing that the man was resolved, and losing all respect and all professional etiquette, in the natural



resentment he felt at this treatment, the solicitor dragged him back into the office, shut the door, and placed his back against it; and plainly told Louis to his face that his own conduct was so bad that it was hopeless for him to persevere in such a suit. A divorce he might get, but damages never. No English jury acquainted with the facts of the case — with Louis's own guilt with Carlotta — would ever give him damages. It would cost him a heavy sum, that was all, and where was the money to come from? He should not supply it; he should take good care to inform the Jews and bill-discounters of Louis's true financial position — let him see if he could get the cash then. Louis grew silent, thoughtful; then he dashed out of the office with an oath that seemed to growl itself out from the very depths of his being.

Arriving at his hotel, he found there a note from Randal, who, having taken advantage of his master's absence to spend a week in a state of idiotic intoxication, had at last woke up to the fact that Horton Knoyle, Esq., had arrived at Bourne Manor. Louis not

unnaturally immediately thought of money. The very name of the banker was synonymous with 'ambrosial cash.' Out of this trivial incident grew a new plan. He would go down and see Pierce, face him out with brazen hardiness, coolly tell him that he intended to bring a suit for divorce against Heloise; tell Horton that Carlotta's name must inevitably appear very conspicuously in it; taunt them both coarsely and rudely with the exposure, the fearful scandal the details must produce, the stigma that would attach for ever to the families; and coolly demand fifty thousand pounds to stay proceedings. The very hardiness, the utter brazen impudence of the idea recommended it to Louis. He laughed loud and long at it. He drank a quantity of champagne, and brooded over it till he filled out every detail. Then, with unparalleled effrontery, he took the train to Avonbourne-road Station, and half an hour afterwards knocked at the door of Bourne Manor.

His chief fear was lest Pierce should refuse to see him; he was apprehensive lest the ser-

vants should receive orders to eject him from the premises. To avoid this, as soon as the door was opened he slipped a five-pound note into the man's hand, and told him to conceal his name; to say that a gentleman wished to see Lord Lestrangle and Horton Knoyle, Esq. By these means it came about that Pierce and Horton, entirely unsuspecting, stepped into the room, and found themselves face to face with the arch-traitor himself. Louis bowed low, and the old mocking smile stole over his face. Horton stiffened into stone; Pierce absolutely started back, as at the sight of some deadly serpent. Horton frowned at Pierce, and motioned to the bell. Pierce for the moment did not comprehend him. Louis wasted no time.

‘Unexpected visit,’ he said; ‘eh, quite unexpected! Nice morning, though, for a journey. Partridges strong this year, eh, Pierce?’

The cool audacity of the fellow, who had thrown himself into a chair, and was regarding them with a smiling face, absolutely took away their breath. Horton was the first to recover himself. Seeing that Pierce was

irresolute and knew not how to act, he stepped to the bell and rang it violently. The man who had opened the door came in immediately—in fact he had been listening outside.

‘Turn him out, Roberts,’ said Horton authoritatively.

‘Yes, turn him out!’ said Pierce, his anger rising.

Horton pointed at the door. Louis smiled. The servant approached him hesitatingly—the five-pound note was crisp in his pocket, he could feel it rustle as he moved. He was in no hurry.

‘I—I—I’ll call the butler,’ he said, and hastened out of the room.

‘Begone!’ thundered Horton, who had now regained his power of speech, and whose form was shaken with passion; ‘liar and traitor, begone!’

‘Easy, easy,’ said Louis. ‘At your age anger is dangerous—apoplexy, you know. Now come, listen to me. This is business.’

‘I will have no words with this fellow,’ said Horton, choking down the almost resistless impulse to fly at the scoundrel’s throat; and

he turned away and stepped back a pace or two, and again rang the bell violently.

‘Hush, stop,’ cried Louis, rising and approaching Pierce. ‘Stop; you are master here. I have come on business. I will leave the moment I have stated that business—as a gentleman, you are bound to hear me.’

Pierce, angry, and fast losing control over himself, was yet still sensitive enough to halt at the word ‘gentleman.’

‘Speak, then,’ he said; and quickly Louis did so. Horton, at the first word ‘divorce,’ returned, and stood beside Pierce, his breast heaving with suppressed passion. Louis coolly laid down his ultimatum, 50,000*l.* or divorce—with disgrace to Heloise, reflected disgrace upon Carlotta, upon both families.

‘Blackguard!’ cried Horton, furious and utterly beyond control; and he struck out violently at him. Louis sprang back, escaped the blow, and dragged a table in front of him, shouting to Pierce for protection. But Horton was not to be denied. Before Pierce could lay his hand on his shoulder, before he could beg him to desist, the enraged banker over-

turned the table, which fell with a fearful crash, laden as it was with cut-glass flower-stands and books; and seizing Louis by the shoulders, shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. His years, his weakness were gone; his rage filled him with vigour, and Louis, always a coward, and much shorter in stature, was but a reed in his grasp. Pierce tried to pull Horton away. The uproar of the falling table, the violent ringing of the bell, and now the shouts and cries of Louis, and the stamping and hurrying of feet, aroused the whole household. The butler, whom the footman, after much pretended difficulty, had found in his proper place, the cellar, rushed up-stairs. The two other footmen, the page, the coachman, who chanced to be in the kitchen, followed. The cook went to the foot of the stairs; the maid-servants gathered on the landings; one screamed, another fainted; all was noise, confusion. Neville, in the morning-room with the ladies, ran out; they rushed after him, and being on the same floor, got to the scene of the row quicker than the servants. Neville dashed at Horton to restrain him; but at that



very moment the banker cast the scoundrel away with his last remaining strength. Louis, shoved backwards, staggered, caught his foot, fell, and sent another table flying through the French window, bringing down a shower of glass. Neville, never seeing or imagining who it was, ran to his assistance, and had him up in an instant, and placed him panting and breathless upon the sofa. There, shaken as he was, and mad with rage and pain, Louis contrived to mutter ‘assault and battery, law and police,’ and he ground his teeth, and gibed and swore. As for the banker he fell into a chair, and wiped his forehead, and asked for a glass of wine. Georgiana and Carlotta at the door saw Louis, and started back. Georgie involuntarily glanced at Carlotta. She never showed what must have passed in her mind by the movement of a muscle of her face. She dragged Georgie in; and turned and shut the door slam in the face of the servants, now crowding in the passage, and calmly turned the key. ‘It is all right,’ she said boldly. ‘Mr. Brandon has stopped the—the disturbance. Go down-stairs, or every one of you will be

dismissed.' Pierce, at his wits' ends, utterly unfit for such emergencies as these, thanked her with a glance. Neville, at last perceiving who it was he had helped to seat, started back with disgust and loathing.

'What!' he cried—'what!'

'Peace,' said Pierce, coming forward and holding out his hand. 'This is my house. I am master here.'

'Peace!' shouted Louis, now recovered, and starting up. 'You shall have no peace. I'll dog your grey hairs till you hate your very life. I'll—'

'Silence! or I'll *kill* you,' said Neville, advancing and lifting his arm.

Carlotta seized it.

'This is *my* fault,' she said, drooping her head. 'This is *my* guilt returning on me. For God's sake, Horton, be calm. Pierce, help me keep him back;' for the banker, refreshed, was returning to the attack. Pierce held him on one side, Carlotta on the other. Neville smiled, and refused to aid; he would have been delighted to have seen Louis pitched into the yard. Georgiana, almost helpless in

such a *mêlée*, clung to his arm, with a face pale as a sheet. Louis seized the opportunity.

‘I came here for business,’ he said. ‘I will go the moment that business is over. I have been assaulted, cowardly assaulted; two to one,’ he cried, almost hysterically. ‘It is ungentlemanly. Hear me first—I claim it.’

‘Listen to him,’ said Pierce, struggling with Horton. ‘On my honour, he shall be kicked out afterwards.’

‘On your honour?’

‘On my honour.’

On this strange assurance, Horton, the banker, usually the most peaceful of men, ceased to struggle, and Louis returned to the attack. He abandoned his coarse and insulting taunts—he saw that Neville would not stand them—he painted vigorously the exposure, the fearful scandal that would follow. Then he changed his tactics, and pleaded for one more chance of *reforming*—Neville felt sick—to pay his debts, and go for ever and for ever; otherwise the result would be wretched, for he was desperate. Lady Knoyle’s name would be dragged in the dirt. He glanced at Car-

lotta. She had started back as if recognising who it was for the first time. His reference, his glance, turned all eyes upon her. Her face was pale; her eyes dilated, her lips apart, her hands clasped. Her breath came short and thick. Her attitude, her whole expression, indicated the most intense fear, loathing, horror, shame. It was admirable; it would have won plaudits at Drury Lane. Here its effect was magical. Every one there pitied her but Louis. He sneered. Georgiana ran to her sex's assistance, and passed her arm round to support her. Horton started, and held out his hand. Pierce cried, 'My child! my child!' 'O father,' shrieked Carlotta; 'save me, save me,' and she fell at his knees and burst into a passion of sobs and crying. Then Pierce and Horton and Neville lifted her up, and carried her out of the room on to the lawn, through the French window, for she seemed to be gasping for air; and Georgiana swept after them with a fierce backward glance at Louis, as much as to say, 'You brute!' Carlotta, a little better, begged to be removed out of sight. 'Hide me,' was

her cry. 'Hide me'! They were on the point of assisting her in-doors and up-stairs, when another person appeared upon the scene. Noel walked round the great thicket of ever-greens and rhododendrons, and came plump on them. When he reached Avonbourne he had hesitated; he had reconnoitred the place; finally he had walked on to the lawn behind the shrubbery, to look at the house; at last summoned up courage and stepped out, and saw Carlotta supported by Horton and Neville; Georgiana bathing her forehead with eau de cologne; Pierce eagerly intent upon his daughter's face; Louis standing at the smashed window, sneering; and a crowd of eager faces peering out of every available place of observation—the servants. He would have drawn back; but it was too late—he had been seen. He came forward, screwing up his courage. He was not afraid of the lion or of death; but he had within him the consciousness of guilt.

'Welcome!' sneered Louis, from the smashed window. 'Welcome!'

Carlotta turned wildly on Noel, as if in a delirium.

‘Where is my sister—my sister?’ she shrieked. ‘Give her back, traitor!’

‘Ay, traitor!’ said Pierce.

‘Traitor!’ said Neville.

‘Traitor!’ said Georgiana.

‘Where is she—my Heloise—my darling child?’ screamed Carlotta, darting up to him, shaking him.

‘I—I—really—’ began Noel, utterly dumbfounded. ‘I am come to bring her—’

‘What, tired of her already?’ interrupted Louis, who was now on the lawn. ‘So soon?’

‘Blackguard!’ said Noel. ‘Sir,’ addressing Pierce, ‘believe me, your daughter is pure as when she left.’

‘Where is she, sir?’ said Pierce sternly, striding forward and grasping his shoulder.

‘Where is she?’ screamed Carlotta.

‘Where is she?’ echoed Georgiana.

‘Hear me, hear me!’ said Noel, in utter confusion. ‘You at least, Neville.’

But Neville coldly turned his head aside. Thus abandoned, a species of despair took possession of Noel’s mind. He tried again to get a hearing; they demanded Heloise.



‘My wife!’ suddenly shouted Louis, springing right in front of Noel. ‘My wife! whom you decoyed away before my very eyes. He knocked me down, gentlemen, senseless, stunned—see, here is the mark of his hand on my lip; he stole her away—forced her away while I was helpless.’

‘Before God!’ cried Noel, seeing that the feeling was setting against him still more violently.

‘Sir,’ said Pierce, quite calmly, ‘call not that name into this discussion.’

Frantic with rising rage, Noel shook off Carlotta—who instantly fell to the earth and lay there as if helpless, while Georgiana tried to lift her up—shook off Pierce, who staggered backwards.

‘I say I will be heard.’

‘It is his virtue,’ cried Louis.

‘His *virtues*,’ cried Georgiana.

‘Where is Heloise?’ asked Pierce.

‘Heloise!’ said Neville. ‘Traitor, where is Heloise?’

‘Before God, she is pure as when—’

‘He is a liar,’ shouted Louis; ‘he has had

her six weeks—now he wishes to be rid of her!’

‘Devils in hell!’ swore Noel, stamping his foot.

But they crowded round him; they called for Heloise; they would not hear him; and Louis danced about in an ecstasy of excitement; and Carlotta still lay apparently senseless on the green lawn at his feet.

‘Pure!’ cried Louis mockingly. ‘Six weeks with this fellow, and pure—pah!’

‘I tell you she was burnt! She has not seen—I mean been in my company—I mean—I mean—’

‘Listen,’ cried Louis; ‘he means we are fools to be duped by such trash.’

‘Fools indeed!’ said Horton, still bitter with his own wrongs.

‘Fools!’ echoed Pierce. ‘It cannot be believed.’

‘Then, by Heaven!’ cried Noel, mad with rage, with humiliation, with the bitter sense of his own position—this his attempt to return met with sneer and contumely—this that had cost him so much flung back on him as a

worthless thing. He turned to leave, and caught his foot in Carlotta's dress and staggered; and Louis, seizing his opportunity, darted forward and struck him from behind. He fell, and his head struck a flower-pot heavily. It did not stun him, but it staggered him for a moment as he rose on his knee. Then the whole posse of servants, who had gradually drawn nearer, set upon him—upon the man who was down—and dragged and hounded him off the place, hustled him to the gateway, and thrust him staggering and dazed, but smarting with bitter, bitter, bitterest sense of injustice, into the dirty road, and slammed the gate and fastened it behind him, and with all the servant's true gallantry mounted on the wall and gibed at him. And thus they thrust away the man who repented from the very gate.

Then they lifted up Carlotta, and carried her within, and bathed her with eau de cologne, and poured brandy upon her lips, and cut away her stays, and sent post haste for the nearest medical man; and Georgiana never left her for a moment till she opened her eyes and asked where she was. O, it was admir-

ably done; it would have brought down the house at Drury Lane.

Meantime, the storm of passion being exhausted, they had come to business, as Louis called it, down-stairs. Pierce and Horton, after holding a hurried consultation with Neville, came to the decision that anything was better than the law-courts, the terrible exposure, the coarse comments, the gibing sneer, the irremovable infamy, especially for Carlotta's sake. You see, she was the returned prodigal, they were careful over her. She had moved their hearts only a few minutes since; they could not forget her agony; her disinterestedness too, she who had been so distressed for Heloise, so indignant—who now lay in a deep swoon up-stairs; for Carlotta—yes, for Carlotta's sake!

Horton and Pierce agreed to pay 50,000*l.*, to discharge Louis's debts, as Louis pretended, though none of them could swallow that. Still they did not openly question it—they could not descend to chaffer with such a fellow. They promised that the money should be paid in three days, Horton engaging to advance

the whole, as he could do easier than Pierce, whose wealth was more in land. They offered him an I.O.U., but Louis loftily disclaimed any doubt of the good faith—‘among gentlemen!’ he said. They bowed; Louis left them. He went back to the station, en route for London. On the way he passed in the gathering gloom a man lying on the sward beside the dusty road, with his head on his arms, and his arms on a flint-heap. He hurried by—always a coward—thinking it might be a drunken man.

It was Noel. He had fallen, overcome with utter misery, and was sobbing—dry sobs, not yours, madam, which throw out with every gasp a shower of tears—but dry sobs that shook his form. For the man loved Heloise now as never he had done before. He had really and truly repented. He wished to restore her; but if her own father, his own brother, if Georgiana refused to credit him, even to hear him—And he had been brought up in the school of gentlemen. The sneer, the gibe! But it was not this, it was the love of Heloise, the reaction of the long anxiety, the fever-heat of

his passion fighting his better nature. Yet he would not have fallen so had it not been for that treacherous blow, which had left him still half dazed. After a while his strong physical organisation renovated him. He arose and continued his way to the station, full of a fiery burning hatred, a frenzied shame, a stern determination that, as they had repulsed him, he would go on—on, even if he and Heloise descended to the dust.

About that time Carlotta recovered and sat up, and spoke feebly—*just before the doctor came*. She was wise, very wise, in her generation. Beauty, they say, is only skin deep; so sometimes are hysterics.







## CHAPTER X.

AFTER an inconceivable period of idiotcy the detectives and agents so long employed by Horton Knoyle to trace his nephew Francis woke up to the idea that possibly a man who did not shave might in time come to possess a beard and moustache; that a man who rarely washed might look dirty; that a man who had little ready money might look half starved and pallid. Hitherto they had confined their search for such a well-dressed, well-fed, generally gentlemanly-looking young man as the nephew of so great a millionaire might naturally be supposed to be. Now they woke up to the idea that as he had not applied for his allowance, and as he had no visible means of subsistence, they must look for this man among the dirty and cadaverous, and not among the well-dressed beef-eaters. Shortly after this astounding piece of infor-

mation was arrived at they telegraphed to Horton Knoyle, Esq.—telegraphed, as if a letter would not answer the purpose, after a twelvemonth of do-nothingness—to say that they believed they were on the track of the ‘person;’ and that he had been seen walking up and down the street in front of the said Horton’s house in Mayfair. Horton had had so many beliefs and possibilities and conjectures sent to him, that he took no notice of this one, and made no comment upon it. It is my belief that the said detectives and agents had found out Francis’s whereabouts long, long enough ago, but preferred drawing a good sum monthly for expenses to finding the object of their search. Till at last, knowing that Horton had returned to England, they became apprehensive lest he should take up his residence in London, and not impossibly look out of window and see his nephew pacing up and down the pavement in front of the house. Francis certainly had made no effort to conceal himself. The blow which had sent him crashing among flower-pots and fuchsias, smash down ten feet into the brick flooring of the

conservatory, had done him no great physical injury. There were no bones broken, no ribs cracked. But his head—that was the point. He had never been bright from a boy—always pale, languid, fearful and timorous, afraid of the dark, and superstitious.

Whether the hard brick floor beat out what little sense had ever existed in him or not, or whether some injury was done to his brain, certain it is that from that moment he grew morose, melancholy, careless of dress and appearance, intent on one idea only, and that idea was Carlotta. A belief took possession of him that they were all leagued against him—his brother, the Cain who had stunned him,—his uncle, her husband—all of them. His instinct was to hide himself away from them—that is, to avoid them. He changed his lodgings into a cheaper and worse neighbourhood, and got his living by joiner's work, at which he was very clever. Down in Sussex at the clergyman tutor's he had fitted up a lathe and furnished himself with an endless number of tools; and this knowledge and natural ability he now turned to account.

He would have none of Horton's money; he hated him and all the world but Carlotta. She was his god. But she was gone. Before he awoke from the kind of stupor into which the illness that followed the blow and fall had thrown him she was gone, he knew not whither. In his half-silly state he had no idea how to follow her. His plan was to watch her mansion till she returned. And this he had done for a whole long year—working all day, walking all the evening up and down in front of the mansion. He had ceased to take any pride in his appearance; his beard and moustache had grown in the most ragged manner; his hair hung down his back; his face was dirty and unwashed, haggard and wretched to look at. His friends might have passed him in the streets, and absolutely did do so at times and knew him not; because they were not looking for him in such guise as that. At last Carlotta returned, and left for Avonbourne; he followed her. His own idea was to get to speak with her; he had a dumb idea that she would right his wrongs; she would put everything

all right for him—even his stupid head, that seemed filled with a thick cloud. But at Avonbourne he waited and watched for her in vain. He dared not go to Bourne Manor; he learnt that Horton was there, and he hated Horton; but he watched about the place. Carlotta did not come out. About this time the agents missing him from his usual beat, and afraid lest anything should be discovered without their assistance, telegraphed again to Horton that his nephew had certainly gone down into the country; had he been to Bourne Manor—should they come down? Horton answered that they were to come at once. They went; but they arrived too late.

Carlotta believed that she had gone as far as was in her power—as far as was safe at present. She had completely gained over Pierce; she had blinded Horton and wheedled him round; she had made a great impression upon Georgiana, *almost* made a friend of her. In the disturbance consequent upon Louis's appearance she had made a great stride in advance. The very circumstance that might have been fatal to her she had turned to the

utmost advantage. Since then they had doubled their attention to her; they had treated her as one who had been wronged; that was a very different thing from one who had done wrong and had repented. There was a marked change in their manner towards her; it was less the manner of tolerance, more the manner of cordiality. But Carlotta, having gone thus far, having succeeded so admirably, grew afraid of that very success. She feared to be too constantly before them; she feared a possible reaction. It was extremely difficult for her to be incessantly doing something, or saying something that would interest them in her. Moreover, the affection of the best of human beings, and of the most impressionable of them, is liable at times to waver. And to tell the truth she was growing weary of the part she had to play; weary of the assumption of virtue and humility. She longed for a little excitement; at least for an opportunity of doing as she chose; so she determined to leave Bourne Manor. She broke this intention to Pierce; in the most humble manner asked his advice and permission. Pierce



thought she was right; it was perhaps wise not to be too much with Horton at present. He would speak to Horton. Horton gravely concurred; he was quite willing that she should go. He wrote a cheque for 1000*l.*, and gave it to Pierce for her. She was to go to the house in Mayfair; but to keep quiet—not to be seen in public places where her presence would call for remarks. Then came the leave-taking. Horton shook hands with her for the first time. He did not offer to accompany her to the station; but he came to the hall-door. Georgiana kissed her—yes, kissed her; so did Pierce. Neville wished her a pleasant journey. Standing in the porch they watched the ponies, in the very pony-carriage Heloise had driven in, carry her swiftly away out of sight round the turn of the road. Then they felt as if the house was empty; she filled a space which was now void. They missed her, they admitted to themselves as much. Past the Sun Inn, under the spreading chestnut-tree—past the green meadows, over which Heloise had walked with Noel; past the golden cornfields, ripe now, and ready for the

sickle ; past the very flint-heap, the cold hard pitiless heap, upon which Noel had flung himself in an agony of shame and rage and misery when they cast him out from the gate. This was the station; she was none too soon, the express train was waiting at the platform. Men and ladies were hurrying to and fro, snatching a glass of wine, a biscuit, a few spoonfuls of burning hot soup, buying a book and papers, swallowing ices, trying to lay up a preparation to fortify themselves against the long run before them, for the train did not stop till it reached London. Carlotta took her ticket from the coachman, who got it for her; asked if her luggage was labelled, and stepped out for the platform purse in hand. As she approached the carriage a hand was laid on her arm. She turned, and seeing a dirty cadaverous face, long ragged beard, and untrimmed moustache, her first thought was for her purse, in which was the 1000*l.* cheque; and she snatched her arm away, and was in the very act of calling for assistance, when Francis—for it was he—whispered his name in her ear.

‘Francis Knoyle !’ said she, surprised, and wondering at the same time, for she had totally forgotten his existence in the turmoil of the last twelvemonth.

‘Yes, me,’ whispered Francis, in a low hurried voice, thick with passion and eagerness. ‘It is me! I love you! I worship you! I have waited for you a whole year; up and down—up and down in front of your house. I always knew you would return. Give me one kiss, Carlotta. Carlotta, come with me; let me come with you.’

‘Have you any money?’ said Carlotta, sneering; yet suddenly recollecting that Francis was Horton’s nephew, and with a momentary vision of wild excitement possibly within her reach out of this cadaverous face.

‘Money!’ said Francis, in a dazed stupid way. ‘Yes, I have money; fifteen shillings. I earned it myself.’

‘Fifteen shillings!’ sneered Carlotta. ‘You are mad.’

‘Any more going? train about to start—get in, if you please, ladies,’ cried the guard, hastening by. She shook off his hand and

stepped into the carriage nearest her, for the doors were slamming and she feared to lose the train. There was a whistle, a puff, and the train left the platform ; leaving Francis stunned, stupefied, motionless as a statue. Not so another gentleman, who rushed from the refreshment-room, his bald head aglow with excitement, shouting to them to stop the train. The guard laughed and said it was impossible ; and the old gentleman with the bald head stamped and swore and flung his arms about, a spectacle which afforded the greatest amusement to the officials, who grinned without an attempt at concealment. This served to divert attention from Francis ; when suddenly an exclamation of horror—genuine horror, no fractious rage—burst from the bald-headed old fellow, and he pointed speechless out upon the rails.

‘Mad!’ The word rang through Francis’s head like the report of a cannon. He had sense enough to know that he was stupid ; his fellow-workmen at the shop laughed at him, jeered at him, said he was silly. In a dull way he had half wondered at himself, and

could not understand why he did not live as he used to do, in every expensive luxury, without toiling for his daily meal. Why was he not as he used to be? When he attempted to answer this problem a thick cloud seemed to rise up in his head, and stand between him and the light. Then he gave it up with a sigh, and resolved to wait till Carlotta came. She would explain it; she would clear his head and return him to the old state. He should be as he had used to be when she came. She had come; she had not known him; she had jeered at him, shook him off, laughed in his face, called him 'mad.' The cruel word rang through his head; it rose upon him like the subtle fumes of brandy, higher and higher into his brain. He lost all sense of his position, where he stood, what he was doing; the memory of his long, long year of waiting; the toil in the cabinet-maker's shop; the scanty earnings; the tedious watch in the streets; the thick cloud in his head. She was right—he was mad. He looked wildly round—on one side the express train was fast diminishing in apparent size as it

rushed with increasing speed out of sight. It carried with it his god—his Carlotta—who had shaken him off and discarded him. On the other side a pilot engine was sliding into the station, with steam shut off, gliding along noiselessly. He was mad. He uttered a yell, and sprang off the high platform, clearing ten feet at a bound, right into the six-foot way, across the first line of metals, and falling on his knees, laid his head down on the rail in front of the advancing pilot engine, just as a condemned criminal might lay his head upon the block. This was what the old gentleman saw—what so suddenly stopped his frantic rage, and converted it into as frantic horror. We all know what happens at these times; everybody is for the moment struck helpless—the mind refuses to grasp the possibilities of the case—the mental machine stands still, and while it stands still the moment is gone, salvation impossible, Death has seized his victim. The engine-driver, on the alert as he was going through a station, instantly saw the frenzied act, reversed his engine, and blew his whistle. The shriek of the whistle,



and the horrible scream of the brake as the fireman screwed it down to the last turn, rang like the yells of demons through the station. But the impetus was too great—the locked wheel glided along the rail, grating, shrieking, tearing off powdered steel, and sending a shower of sparks into the air. The reversed gear could not act so speedily; the steam could not in an instant overcome the impetus of forward motion, and the inertia of the vast mass of iron and steel and brass. The breath of the spectators was drawn thick through the teeth in that hiss which is the inarticulate expression of fearful suspense. But the bald-headed old gentleman with an awful oath rushed forward, sprang as Francis had done clean over the first metals, seized the madman by the tail of his coat as he knelt, and dragged him backwards. Francis's hat, which had fallen off, was crushed the same instant by the ponderous engine. Then there was a rush—spectators, porters, guards, careless of danger, wildly rushed on to the line and surrounded the pair, and dragged them on to the platform. Well it was that there were plenty

of them, for they had to hold Francis, to bind him down like a wild beast. For he was mad indeed; frantically, violently mad; and three of them could barely hold him. The old bald-headed gentleman was the first to recover his coolness; he drew out a long bandanna handkerchief; he twisted it up, and they tied the madman's arms with it. The irascible old fellow remained with him till a fly was brought, and Francis placed between two porters, with his preserver, who, by the bye, was an Indian officer just returned from Calcutta, in front. They took him to the superintendent of police at the nearest town; there they left him till his identity could be discovered, if that were possible. Ten minutes after this horrible affair, the agents arrived from London by the down train in search of Master Francis. When they heard what had just happened, and listened to the description of the madman, they turned pale, and went to the refreshment-bar. It takes a good deal of brandy to drown the remembrance of a neglected duty, when it has so narrowly escaped a close resemblance to moral manslaughter.

It was some few minutes before Carlotta, who had so hastily entered the carriage, had composed herself sufficiently to look round her, and to become aware that she had mistaken the compartment—her dressing-bag was not here. There was a gentleman's hat-box on the luggage-net; a smoking-cap was on the seat opposite her; and in the corner, away from her, a great railway rug. She resented Francis's detaining her, and so making her get into the wrong carriage. He was mad, she said to herself; utterly mad. There was a wild look in his eyes; so dirty too—what could have come to the stupid fellow? She had utterly forgotten the flirtation—the detestable system of encouraging one and leading the other to be jealous which she had pursued with these two young men. It was so little to her; she forgot that it might be something serious to them. They had passed out of her mind entirely; no wonder, after the life she had been leading. With an effort of the mind she cast Francis's haggard face out of her mental vision. It was disagreeable. For years she had cultivated the art of forgetting the

disagreeable; she had learnt how to ignore it; to pass it on one side. The train rushed on with gathering speed. The steady easy motion composed her—she nestled down in her seat, gazed out of window; the warm summer day made her feel slumberous, luxurious. In a little basket she carried in her hand were several splendid plums—the egg-plum—ripe, delicious. Carlotta was peculiarly fond of fruit. She gloated over these plums. She held them up; admired the gloss upon the skin—the bloom; admired the size, the fullness, the ripe luxury of the fruit. She enjoyed it thoroughly. Lounging on the soft cushion, eating the fruit, swiftly drawn along at fifty miles an hour, the haughty beauty revelled in her own inner self. She looked back upon the last few days; she reviewed her triumph. She gloated over it; a mocking smile rose on her lips, especially the repulse of Noel—Heloise's champion. The bitter irony of it amused her, even interested her. For one moment in her life she tried to think not for the sake of herself, but to discover the why and the wherefore of these

strange anomalies of life. Why was she, she the evil and wicked (she admitted this candidly to herself and gloried in it), so readily welcomed—made so much of—petted and praised? Why was the one who had fallen *once* only, who tried to creep back into society, repulsed, driven away with blows and curses and revilings? Pooh, it was too much trouble for her; she could not worry herself with such trash; Heloise had fallen—there was the glory of it. The hated baby-face, the detested living reflection upon her own course of life, was herself a mock and a gibe. Her beauty and her innocence were in the dust—the dust—the *dust*. And Carlotta laughed to herself; and held up an egg-plum, and drew back the curtain of the carriage that the golden sunlight might fall upon it, and light up its translucent lusciousness. The train rushed on—ceaseless, unwearied—strong as a giant, cleaving its way through the forests and over the rivers, by the ripe grass, by the meadows and farmsteads; with a roar under the arches; with a clatter, a shriek, a thunder through the stations, and a

rattle over the points; out again upon the smooth and level way, tearing ahead, ahead, ahead, driven along by the irresistible power of fire. Carlotta could not for ever think of her triumph, could not dwell for hours upon Heloise's fate and the repulsion of Noel. She looked out of window and amused herself with the passing scenes: the slow barge on the canal, the children playing in the road, the carriage driving along, the distant churches and downs and woods. But she wearied soon of this. She was angry that she had brought no book; nothing to amuse herself. She took out her purse and looked at the 1000*l.* cheque, and gloated over it. It was not much to what she had had in the times past; but it was a good round sum—a good beginning. With this there was excitement, pleasure, fashion, dress. She was not to go out—not to be seen. She laughed a low musical laugh at this idea. Not to be seen! Wait. Then she began to weave plans and methods; passed on to dress and bonnets, and Madame Louise unvisited these many a day. They would stare at her at that establish-



ment, that is they would in their hearts. Perhaps they would ask her for a deposit—very well, they should have it. But this work of imagination, this creating pleasures in her mind, could not go on for ever. She replaced the cheque, and grew restless, anxious to arrive. She blamed the train for its slowness; it was travelling at that moment at fifty-three miles an hour. She looked at her watch; still an hour to run, not much more than half way. How tedious these trains were! She looked round the carriage; at the hat-box and the smoking-cap. Evidently some one had got out, and either missed the compartment in his hurry, or had lost the train. The railway rug attracted her attention. It was a large and beautiful rug, imitating a panther's skin. It was not the rug itself; it was the oddness of there being a rug at all at that season of the year, when the heat was so great. What on earth did the fellow want with a rug? She yawned—it was nothing to her. She looked out of the window again. She moved restlessly upon her seat. She flung her feet up on the opposite cushions. As she did so, she

fancied she heard a slight noise, and looked quickly round; there was nothing. In throwing her feet on the cushion she must have disturbed it a little, for the contour of the rug was slightly altered; she had shaken down some of its folds. That perhaps was the cause of the noise—only a slight rustle.

She looked out of window again, looked at her watch, took out her pocket-book and pencil to make a note; and by the time she had got it ready forgot what she wanted to write. Rattle and roar, hiss and thunder, over a viaduct, between high embankments shutting out all view of the country, out again on level ground, with tall poplar-trees and firs. As she gazed out of window the corner of her eyes became conscious of a motion in the rug—that is, she fancied it. She looked quickly round. The rug was still, motionless. She watched it, playing with her watch-chain. She watched it quietly, lazily, out of a desire for something to amuse her. Queer old stories ran through her mind. Somewhere she had read, or some one had told her, a trick of the Indian juggler. You sat in your

own room ; he sat beside you ; he took your handkerchief, you saw there was nothing in it ; he rolled it up into a ball, and told you to fling it to the uppermost corner. You did so ; it lay there as a handkerchief would do. You watched it ; in a few minutes it began to swell, it puffed out, it rolled towards you ; your blood curdled as it came right to your very feet, rolling over the carpet. Just as you were about to run screaming away the juggler kicked it, and it fell prone, flat, motionless—only a handkerchief!

The chain fell out of her hand, her eyes fastened themselves upon the rug. Surely that was a motion? A fold had certainly disappeared. Yet the rug had made no movement ; the fold had simply fallen. It was only the effect of the shaking and jarring of the carriage ; but somehow she could not take her eyes off it. She laughed at herself ; she made herself look out of window. She quickly glanced back again. It certainly had moved. She gazed fascinated, an intense curiosity possessed her. The folds of the rug rose slowly, very gradually, but perceptibly, rose and

swelled outwardly, puffed out as if air had been blown into them from beneath. Carlotta stared; it must be a lap-dog, a rabbit, a cat with kittens—some one's pets. Pooh! it was nothing. Look again—the rug rose higher; some hard substance seemed to move forward under it and then fall. The rug collapsed, and a species of shiver seemed to run through it; then it was still again. Roar and rattle, thunder, jar, shake; they went through a station, over the points again, out into the level way. Carlotta was intent upon the rug; it puzzled her, it filled her with an intense and eager curiosity, not unmixed with a little terror, a vague horror, which at once repulsed and impelled her to investigate. She reflected that her feet were on the cushion close to the rug; she took them down. The same species of shiver ran through the rug again, and there was a slight sound. Unmistakably there was something under the rug, or was that noise the sound of escaped air? Gazing she could not believe her senses; the rug slowly inflated itself and moved bodily towards the edge of the seat. It was a cumbrous muffled motion,

but it came. She watched it, her heart beat high, but she did not shrink. There was no sound; she looked in vain for any legs, any tail, any ears, any sign of animal life. She made a sound with her lips as persons do when they call a dog; no wagging of tail answered her. 'Puss!' she said, 'Pussy! Pussy!' There was no mew, no sound. The rug moved slowly in a helpless fashion to the very edge of the cushion. Then it seemed to get confused; it rolled itself up together, it shivered; the folds rose and fell. Carlotta's amazement rose to the extreme. Finally it fell over the edge—bump, an unmistakable bump of something heavy; it was no spectre, then, no juggling feat.

A fearful scream.

Carlotta had sprung upon her seat, and was clinging to the rail of the luggage-net. Her dilated eyes were fastened upon the floor of the compartment. Out from under the edge of the rug—released at last—protruded the hammer-like head, the black glittering eye of a snake. The two gazed at each other for a moment. Another scream rushed from Car-

lotta's lips, drowned in the roar and rattle of the train. All the woman's innate horror of the serpent tribe, all the instinctive hatred and fear, the convulsive dread rose in her mind, intensified by the very vigour of her physical organisation. She screamed again and again in rapid succession. Her eyes were fixed upon the snake.

For a few seconds the serpent remained still, for the first time aware of human presence, still and watchful. The glittering bead-like eyes were bent upon her, the forked tongue darted in and out. Then it rose a little higher, then the rug shivered ; she understood that now—it was the folds of the serpent moving, uncoiling. The neck rose up, then a part of the body. A turn of the line at that moment, and the brilliant summer sunshine shone in upon the floor of the compartment. The colours of the serpent's neck gleamed and glistened in the sunlight, its eyes flashed, the blackness of its tongue was intensified. It drew its length out from under the rug, and stood revealed in all its horrible size and power.



Her eyes were fastened on it, her breast panted, the colour had left her cheek, the drops of perspiration stood upon her brow; the basket of fruit had fallen from her hand, the last egg-plum had rolled right on to the rug close to the snake's tail; one great blue flower they had placed over the fruit had fallen upon the creature's body. Her hand grasped the rail with convulsive force, her frame shook with the sway of the carriage as it rushed along.

Even her terror could not destroy for long the strong hardness of her mind. In a few moments the convulsive shudder of her frame ceased; her eyes did not cease to watch the snake; but her mind began to work. She knew the creature in an instant, she knew its power—it was the cobra di capello. Even in the agony of the moment she marvelled in her mind how it had got there. This was the use of the rug, then—to keep this creature warm. But that was nothing to her; the snake was there; could she save herself? She had no weapon; her fruit-knife had fallen on the floor; it was useless, the blunt silver

would not cut a stick. She had no pocket-knife. In her dressing-bag she had a stiletto, one the Archduke had given her. But the dressing-case was in another compartment. Even had it been there would it have been of any use? Before she could kill the creature one single snap of its yellow teeth would be sufficient. She looked at her thin summer dress; the teeth would go through it into her arm or bust as easily as if it had been paper. While she pondered the train rushed through a small station. She started and screamed for assistance; she looked out of the window, she saw the signalman with his white flag; he was holding the flag out, with his head turned away, smiling at his child who was bringing him his tea. Her voice was lost in the rattle of the train. She looked at her watch, they had still half an hour to run.

The cobra moved; the shudders returned to her. Her mind was calm now; but the body could not conquer its convulsive tremor. The cobra moved; it glided along the floor, it reared itself up against the door, its head almost looked out; it lowered its head and

went under the seat opposite. She saw a box there with the lid open. That was the creature's box, no doubt. Wild hopes floated in her mind ; if it crept in she could shut the lid on it. She watched it, her heart bounding like a racehorse, her breath held tight. The cobra moved round the box, glided over it, past it, right to the other door of the carriage. Then it reared itself again, and again lowered its head, and then passed under the seat on which she was standing.

Carlotta tried to think of another resource. The heavy cushions—should she lift one up, hurl it on the snake, and stamp on it? To do so she must get down and stand on the floor, otherwise she could not lift the cushion. Was there anything else she could throw at it? Her boots. Instantly she lifted her foot and tore off one boot, and held it ready ; it was a light thin thing. How she longed for a heavy-clouted shoe !

The cobra crept out again, stayed in the centre of the floor ; she poised her hand and aimed, and was in the act to throw, when the creature moved again towards the box. Hope

again raised itself in her mind ; she paused. Yes, the snake was going into the box ; its head went in, its body followed ; she saw its head go all round the edge of the box inside, then fall, and all was still. Her heart gave a bound ; she was in the act to spring down and close it when she drew back with a shudder. *The tail was out.* The box was not long enough. The snake's tail, just the end of it, was out—about five inches hung over the edge of the box. Her hopes fell to the earth. She paused, she looked at her watch again ; three minutes had passed, seven-and-twenty minutes before they were due. Should she remain still standing there, and trust to the snake staying in the box, or should she make a desperate attempt to close the lid ? She paused, her mind was in favour of waiting ; her body, shuddering still, drove her on to the attempt. Just then the snake raised its head, looked out of the box, and hissed. A jar of the carriage had disturbed it. She determined instantly. Any moment the creature might come out. The head sank back. She sprang down, she seized the lid, she

crushed it down with all her strength. The sharp edge of the deal box snapped on the five inches of tail and crushed it flat. The cobra hissed frightfully, flung itself about, shook the box with its desperate struggles. Carlotta pressed on the lid with all the might of her arms; but they trembled with excitement, and the box being under the seat she could not bring her weight to bear. The forked tongue of the snake shot out, where the edges of the box did not meet, within three inches of her arm. Still she pressed it down—firm.

Thus there was a moment when victory was nearly with mind over brutal vigour and venom. Had she only let the lid rise ever so little the snake would have instinctively drawn its tail in, and she might have shut the lid and fastened it. But in her agony or her fright she did not think of this. How should she? There are some people who believe that the thoughts of the mind, at least in emergencies like this, do not arise in the mind itself: that they are prompted by Heaven or—Carlotta did not pray: she had long forgotten, as it were, the idea of a God. In this

terrible struggle for life it was life alone she thought of. But we have no right to judge her.

The cobra, mad with pain, smarting with the wound inflicted by the sharp edge of the box, swelled and hissed and put forth all its strength to get out. In these struggles the reptile naturally turned its head round to the agonised part—its head sought its tail; then the head saw that here the edge of the box was wider apart, and slipped its head out. Just the head—nothing more. The forked tongue, the yellow teeth, were within three inches of Carlotta's arm. A lump rose in her throat, a sickening sensation overcame her; her arm relaxed its pressure, the head was thrust out further; she shrieked—sprang back. The cobra was out!

Carlotta leapt on the seat again, clung to the bar of the luggage-rail, screamed fearfully. All her courage, her strength of mind, left her. She shook, she trembled, convulsive shudders of horror and loathing passed over her, and scream upon scream rushed from her lips. The people in the next carriage at last heard this; they thrust their heads out



of window and asked what was the matter. She did not hear them—the rattle of the train, the sound of her own hysterical shrieks drowned their voices.

The cobra! Mad with rage and pain, the fearful brute raised itself, and darted at the seat on which she stood. She rushed to the door furthest away; sprang down and put her hand out, and tried to open it to get out, and spring on to the tender mercies of the hard earth. A wild phantasmagoria of tree and sky and river passed before her eyes; she struggled at the handle, straining her hands.

It was locked! She turned. The cobra was close to her. She kicked at it with her right foot, forgetting that she had taken her boot off. Instantly the reptile struck at it. She felt the sharp smart of its teeth in her instep; she trampled on the beast in her agony, and—unutterable horror!—spurning it under foot, she reached the other door—she turned the handle.

With one shriek of fearful agony, that rose above the roar of the rushing train, she hurled herself out.



## CHAPTER XI.

LOUIS, when he got back to London next day, after the scene at Bourne Manor, took a hansom cab and went down to his solicitors' office in the City. Nominally the office was already closed; but the principal was there, still busy over a great law-case. Louis saw him, and professed that he had come with the express purpose of withdrawing the hasty words of which he had been guilty. He said that he had forgotten himself; he had been much excited; he had acted most ungentlemanly. The solicitor received him respectfully, but smiled rather grimly at these professions, till Louis declared that he had come over to the other's opinion, that a law-suit with a view to divorce was unwise and impolitic. At this the other brightened up and became cordial. He was a man who had spent so much time in the endeavour to persuade other people into his way

of thinking, that at last it had grown to be a kind of monomania with him. The moment Louis said that he agreed with him, he was all delight, all politeness. He was extremely busy at that hour. This case—pointing to some papers on the table—was coming on next day. Several important witnesses from Australia were expected that evening to confer with him; else, if my lord would do him the honour, he should have great pleasure in seeing him at dinner. Would my lord deign to do him the extreme honour of dining with his wife, his daughters, and their party that evening? They would be delighted; they would welcome him most cordially, if he would but excuse the absence of the host. He would telegraph that he was coming.

Louis thought a moment, then he accepted the invitation.

‘I’ll go,’ he said. ‘It’s at Croydon, isn’t it?’

The solicitor wrote him the address, and away went Louis for the 6.30 train from London-bridge. He had dined there several times before; the solicitor was, in fact, an old servant and friend of his family. That

was not his reason now. The truth was, he hardly knew how to amuse himself on that particular evening, and he knew his host's daughters were decidedly pretty. They would make much of him as a real live lord. Louis liked to be petted, even in this way. He would go—O yes, decidedly he would go! And he went.

He walked past St. Paul's, down Cannon-street towards the bridge. He had had so much sitting the day previous in the train, that it was a relief to walk, it stretched him out, and there was plenty of time. So he strolled leisurely down Cannon-street, joining in the vast throng of City men and clerks who were just beginning to flow out of the great gold-mine towards their homes in the suburbs. His reflections were of the most gratifying character. He lit a cigar; he placed his hands in his pockets; he sauntered along in the very extremest height of the dawdler, if such a phrase is permissible. He enjoyed the contrast to the hurrying crowd around him. His own motives were superior; his own life was so loftily superior, so much higher than

those miserable toilers, glad of their little hour of rest. These fellows toiled hard day after day, hour after hour, till the hours and the days mounted up into weeks, and months, and years, and thought themselves extremely fortunate if they succeeded in acquiring a competency after a quarter of a century of labour. Look at the life they spent to get it: all the elasticity and youth and vigour was taken out of them by the time they had got the cash wherewith to enjoy themselves. Poor wretches, how inferior!

Contrast his own course. He had made 50,000*l.* in one hour; and how? Not by a previous life of self-denial, of hard work, of weary, weary hours of plodding industry; but by simply indulging his worst passions—by plunging into the most wicked pleasures. He glanced back at the dome of St. Paul's. The declining sun lit up the golden cross till it shone like fire. A sneer mounted to his mouth; he took out his cigar, and puffed out a cloud of smoke, which rose curling up in the still evening air. He stood still and watched it rise, heedless of the obstruction he

caused in the hurrying crowd; they could get out of his way.

The cross! The sneer lingered on his lip as he cast his glance upwards at it. Truly, he had led a Christian life. These myriads straining, struggling around him, they had at least *worked*—that was in itself, to a degree, a part of the duty of man; and see how they were rewarded! Look at their faces, old and young, all full of an anxious care—a desire to get forward—a restless trouble. Look at himself: he had ease, comfort; his pleasure was his labour, and truly it paid well—50,000%. He glanced at the golden cross again, shining like fire. Truly, the cross had rewarded these struggling millions well. He smiled, and his smile was worse than his sneer, and turned and strolled on again, still slower and more indolently. He was quite satisfied; he had done exceeding well. He did not believe there was a devil; but if there was, he paid his servant liberally. ‘For if there should be a devil,’ thought Louis, ‘I have been a faithful henchman of his.’ He was full of an indolent complacency—a sublime self-satisfac-



tion. He had revenged himself on Noel; he had seen him driven from the garden, thrust out into the dusty road, despised, condemned, reviled. No need to summons him; no need to sue him for damages *à la divorce*. There was a sweeter revenge by far. He had struck him too in return—not so strong a blow, perhaps, as he had received, but as strong as his arm could deliver; and—ha, ha, ha!—it had had its effect. He had examined the great terra-cotta flower-pot against which Noel's head struck afterwards, and it was cracked from top to bottom. He must have had the devil of a black eye—ha, ha, ha! It was quite refreshing to think of. Noel would not get over the memory of it this many a year to come. Very likely his face was marked—he hoped so devoutly. To see him roll over—it was as good as watching a scampering hare shot in the head turn summersaults till it fell dead. To watch him jostled and hustled and shoved along by the crowd of footmen and servants and maids—even buttons and the butler pushing behind—it was delightful to think of.

Heloise too—ah, she would begin to *feel* it now! Her lover was tired of her; he would turn her away. This repulse would disgust him; he would hate her; she would be thrown upon the tender mercies of the streets—the sooner the better. He was about to bleed Horton and Pierce. Pierce he cared little about, one way or the other. Horton he hated—hated as men only hate those whom they have injured. Even now a dark frown shot over his brow as he thought of Carlotta's husband. He had not forgotten Horton's attack--the push, and his own ignominious fall. He should have his revenge; he should bleed him of that very money upon which he set the highest store. He had had his revenge already, though Horton did not know it. Several times at Avonbourne it had been on the tip of his tongue to blurt it out—to throw it in Horton's teeth, to glory in it, and mock at him. It was he who had betrayed General Shebang to the United States Government, thereby taking fully a quarter of a million out of Horton's pocket. Luckily he had restrained himself, otherwise no threats would have pre-

vailed upon the banker. With this additional sum to come, he should have robbed him of 300,000*l.* He positively revelled in the thought. If only he could have put the whole of this sum in his own pocket—*if*: his mouth watered at the idea. What a spree it would have been ! Why, he might—ah, he might do that even now !

Behind all his thoughts and reveries there had lurked a treacherous ill-formed design, when once he had got hold of this 50,000*l.*, to go on with the divorce suit after all; only he was afraid that Horton might sue for a divorce from Carlotta in return, and so make him pay damages. But a better thought had struck him now—an exquisite refinement of revenge.

Once he had got hold of this 50,000*l.*, he would go back to Carlotta, and get her to fly with him the second time. That would cut them all to the heart—that would be the bitterest pill of all. Her redemption—*her* reformation ! The man laughed at it. Why, he had seen through her acting even in the excitement at Bourne Manor. He knew she

was a liar to the backbone. He should not be surprised if, out of sheer contrariness, out of the mere delight of inconsistency, she should cast away these puritanical airs, and join him at the first mention of the idea.

It was capital; it grew upon him; he began to sketch it out. In three days he should have 50,000*l*. It was true, he had debts; but he had managed that: he had made his peace with his solicitor; he was about to dine with his solicitor's wife and daughters. His host would go to any length to serve him, to preserve so profitable a connection. Why, the mere fact of his dining with Mrs. So-and-so *in a villa* was enough to give her a social superiority sufficient to turn her brain. No, his debts were all right. He should not fly abroad with Carlotta; they would reside in London, and go openly about. They would become the sensation of the town, the lions of the season. It was quite a plan, quite a novelty. He began to think of what class of turn-out he should invest in—something new and striking. He had half a mind even now to turn back and go to some of the

carriage people, and see what there was new in that line. He paused irresolute.

Just at that time he had got to the beginning of the bridge, at the top of the stairs where the steps lead down on the Westminster side of the bridge to the dark passage that leads to the steamboat pier on the City side of the river. Involuntarily he took his cigar out of his lips as he paused to think. He caught sight of a man coming over the bridge with rapid strides, but who was forced to pause by the force of the human current which had set across it, and against which he had to battle his way; a tall man, with a dark bronzed face, and a black bruise on his left temple. It was Noel. Louis dropped his cigar; his colour fled; he stepped back into the shade of the staircase, pressing close against the dirty wall. Always a coward, he dreaded lest Noel should see him—lest he should pounce upon him there. Had Noel seen him, he was ready to shout ‘Police!’ in an instant. He was in an agony of terror—he who a few minutes previously had been exulting in self-complacency; and yet at the same

time he jeered to himself over the mark on Noel's temple—it was the mark of the terra-cotta flower-pot. In another moment Noel was past.

Louis stole from his hiding-place, peering out as a rabbit does at the mouth of his hole. The coast was clear; his spirits rose again; he laughed, buttoned up his coat, and was about to step forward again, when—

When a woman in a yellow dress, who had come up the dark staircase behind him, tapped him on the shoulder. Louis started and turned; saw her, smiled, and held out his hand.

It was clear what her avocation was. She had come up that dark and slimy staircase—you know it, no doubt; where the old woman with the apples crouches ever in the corner of the landing; where there is a close and fetid odour, born of many nuisances; where dirty boys and girls play in the darkness at the bottom. Even in the early August evening it was gloomy, cavernous. She had come up it, out of the black arch, the narrow passages, the underground cellars, the stink, and smell, and dirt below; as it were, out of the



very mud of the Thames—the *sewer* mud; not the *clean* mud of a country pond, but the *sewer* mud of the Thames. A bright and glittering creature, just as you see many-hued moths drag themselves out of the loathsome larva, out of filth and dirt and all abominations. A moth, a night moth, preying upon men. She was handsome in her way; tall, well shaped; her cheeks were red—it was rouge; her eyebrows dark—it was paint; her eyes large, lustrous—it was belladonna; her fingers flashed with jewels. *They* were real—diamonds and rubies, nothing less—mark that. Her dress was yellow—at least we poor men, with our feeble command of knowledge, would call it yellow, though doubtless there was a proper name for this particular shade. There was no mistaking her bold and forward air. She laid her hand on his shoulder, she shook hands with him, and smiled and showed her white teeth. She turned, and Louis followed her. In three steps he was out of sight.

One of the greatest of great French writers—I shall not call him a moralist—has most marvellously described a certain loathsome

and abominable inhabitant of the deep, which he calls a sea-devil, which it is the modern fashion to speak of as an octopus. We have all seen it at the Aquarium; we know its filthy hideous shape, we have crept all over at the sight of it. It fascinates us, sitting in the corners and secret places of the rocks, armed with its suckers, its deadly fingers. This writer tells us how a man full of projects, on the eve of success, a mischievous and evil man, boasting to himself that he should succeed to the fullest of his hopes, with every sign of it around him, went out to bathe, and cooling himself in the sea, complacently passed over his prospects in triumphant review. Then he dived and struck the shallow bottom, and prided himself on the feat; and was about to return to the surface of the water when something caught his foot and held it fast. Weeks after, when the tide was exceptionally low, they found his skeleton. The devil-fish had chained him, and sucked his blood with its hideous arms.

In the rocks and caves, the silent places of our daily life, there sits waiting for us the

octopus, the devil-fish of Fate. While we swim upon the surface it is well; but once turn to the left or to the right, once dive out of the common track, and the fatal clasp of the unseen arm holds us, never to return.

Louis dived after the woman in yellow. In three steps he was out of sight.

Noel too had been cramped in railway carriages till he was glad to escape and walk. He had been to Dover. This was how it was. The night that he had returned to London Heloise sat up for him. She had so far recovered that the doctors rarely visited her, though one nurse remained, more as a companion than out of necessity. She had to take strengthening medicine. Her face was pale and much thinner, otherwise she was quite well. She had marked Noel's absence of manner, she had grown alarmed at his lengthened absence; she could not rest, could not retire to her room, the sanctity of which Noel had never invaded. He came at last, towards midnight. His face struck her with a fear. It was pale, wearied, and there was a dark mark upon one temple. He threw him-

self into a chair. She went to him, and passed her cool hand lightly over his burning forehead. He sat silent for a few minutes; then it burst from him. He told her all—all, without reserve—what his intentions were; what he had done, seen, and suffered; and her face showed the varying turns of her thought. Shall it be admitted? The one great absorbing thought that swallowed up the rest, the one idea that shaped itself into a form, and stood before her in almost a tangible body, was the presence of Carlotta at Bourne Manor. Carlotta—the woman who had wronged her so deeply, whose very evil had thrust her too into outer darkness—sitting there in her father's house, enthroned as a queen! Noel repulsed, pushed away as a leper might have been; and That Woman, that incarnation of all sin and devilry, seated, as it were, on Pierce's knee—Pierce, the father who had loved her so, or seemed to love.

What wonder was it that at that moment belief in Heaven failed her for the hour? that she lost all perception of right and wrong, that her moral strength gave way; and, as

Job was tempted to do, cursed God in her poor fluttering heart? There was no one but Noel to fly to. She sobbed upon his breast; there in the middle of the night, alone with him in that hotel. She begged him to take her away, to carry her over the seas, anywhere. She cried to him to hide her, to have mercy on her—to him to have mercy on her, since even Pierce and Georgie thrust her away. What wonder that Noel gave way? This was the first time that she had lain in his arms since they had left Bourne Manor. Her tears made her sacred in his eyes; he kissed her reverentially; he promised to take her on the morrow. Then he left her, and retired to his own room. Next day, early in the morning, he went by the express to Dover, to order up his yacht. He might have done this by telegraph. But the man was wild with passion and excitement, he burned with an inward fever, he could not rest, the journey was rest to him. He gave his instructions, then he came up by the afternoon express—thus it was that he passed over London-bridge. The yacht was to



steam up to Gravesend on the morrow, he should come on board the same evening. In his haste and excitement he had forgotten the simple expedient of taking Heloise to the yacht, instead of bringing the yacht to Heloise. He dined with Heloise, he was even cheerful and in a measure happy. It was at last settled, the storm was over, his mind was at rest. The struggle between his better nature and his love was over—love had prevailed.

Next day he waited for the telegram that was to tell him the yacht had come up the river. Noon, evening, no telegram. He grew restless; dinner-time, and still no message. The fever of his impatience made him thirsty, he took too much wine; this increased the fever—he must go out. He took up his hat, and saw his pocket-book lying on the mantel-piece, where he had thrown it as useless, soaked with water that night when he fell in the river. This reminded him of the barge-man and the promised reward. He took out two ten-pound notes from his portmanteau, and started off to find his preserver. He had taken the address at the time. It took him



much trouble to discover the whereabouts of the low public-house in Deptford where bargee said he was to be found. When he got there at last, about ten o'clock, bargee was gone—gone to sleep in his barge, they told him. One of them, tempted by a crown, took him to the river and rowed him out in a dingy to the barge. Bargee was smoking his pipe quite contentedly under the cover of the tarpaulin. He was not drunk, for a wonder. He received Noel with a species of clumsy politeness. Noel gave his guide the two half-crowns, and the man shoved off; he relied on bargee to row him ashore. So soon as the fellow in the dingy was out of sight, for Noel did not precisely relish the kind of company there was in this neighbourhood, he drew out his pocket-book and gave the notes to bargee. Bargee's eyes glistened with delight.

'You be a gemman, *you* be,' he said. 'D—d if you ain't! Look yere, I never thought to see *you* again. Will yer smoke?'

'Thanks,' said Noel, 'I have a cigar.'

He lit it, and sat, not unamused with his

position; watching the lights upon the shore, and the reflection of the stars upon the restless water.

‘No moon to - night,’ said the bargee, chuckling; ‘not so fine a night for a swim, sir, as that one you chose.’

Noel laughed.

‘It was dark last night, sir,’ added the man.

‘Was it?’ said Noel carelessly.

‘Look here,’ said the bargee, ‘I s’pose I med as well tell yer, though the p’lice specially said I wasn’t to. But you’re a gemman—that’s what you be.’ And he told the following curious story: last night his barge was lower down a mile or so; nearer the shore, too. It was dark—that is, there was no moon, but there was light in the sky; and as he was near the shore, the glare from a furnace in a manufactory at the river-side cast a long path of red light out upon the water, right across in front of the bows of his boat. He was sitting much as he was at that minute, under shelter of the tarpaulin, but with his head out and smoking. It was hot, close, and he did not feel

inclined to go to sleep. He sat and smoked. Somehow he got to think of the strangeness of his pulling Noel out of the water that night with his boat-hook. In a dim rude kind of way he expressed his sense of the responsibility that for the first time in his life he had found to rest in a manner upon him as a watcher upon the water. But for the merest accident of the current drifting Noel's feet against the side of his boat, he must have been lost. So he came round to the idea that it was his duty, once at least in the night, to lift up the tarpaulin and look out upon the water. Well, he determined to begin that night. He had long had a habit of waking with the first crow of the cock, about one o'clock. True to his habit, he woke at one. True to his determination, he sat up and peered out into the water. The lamps shone all along the river-side; he could see the position of the bridges, distant as they were. The glare from the manufactory still shone out upon the water; but the noise of the rushing wheels was still. The fires were banked up for the night. There was a fog on the surface of the

water. No sound but the 'sock, sock, sock' of the restless wave against his boat. He was about to turn in again, when he saw a dark object float into the streak of light from the manufactory. He was up in an instant. He seized his boat-hook—he brought it up—he lifted it out of the water partly ; but it was heavy. He hailed it; it did not reply. He grew queer ; for in the uncertain light of the furnace glow it looked like the head and shoulders of a man. He tried to haul it in ; he could not ; it was a dead weight—a lifeless lump. He shouted for help ; the hail was returned ; a boatful of river police rowed up. They lifted the lifeless body of a man out of the water. Rum, was it not—very rum ? The body was now lying at the Lamb and Flag, waiting an inquest ; would Noel like to see it ? Certainly not, said Noel. He did not altogether like the story ; it sent a cold shiver through him. He remembered that such as this so he might have been hauled out of the cold and restless waves. He asked bargee to row him ashore. 'Here's the Lamb and Flag,' said the man, as they stepped out ; 'come and

see, sir.' Half unwilling, half impelled by a morbid curiosity, Noel went.

In a small stifling room, with a sickening odour, on a truckle bedstead, there lay something under the sheet. The woman who carried the one guttering candle drew it back; and he saw the livid and naked head and shoulders of a dead man. The thought rushed into his mind that thus he might have lain. He stepped forward—he looked again—he uttered a cry of horror and amazement. The woman dropped the candle in alarm, and it went out. The bargee, strong as a lion on the water, was afraid in the dark with a corpse. He shoved his way out, pushing Noel before him. Noel staggered against the wall in the passage, as white as the whitewash against which he leant.

It was the face of Louis that he had seen. He called for brandy when he had recovered somewhat. With a beating heart he summoned up courage to look once more on the face of the dead. Yes, it was Louis. Even now, in the rigidity of death, the lips were drawn back in the old, old sneer. It was ghastly.

He shuddered and drew back. Still even now he was unconvinced; he asked to see the dead man's clothes. They refused to let him do so without the permission of the police. He had to wait till a sergeant came; then he saw them. He saw too a pocket-book, and in it the name Louis Fontenoy. Then he was satisfied. He turned to the sergeant. 'How did he—' he asked, pointing to the chamber of the dead.

'When folk get into the water,' said the sergeant, 'the water tells no tales; but they *don't always get there of their own will.*'

Noel left his name and address, and begged the sergeant to give him the help of his arm till they could get out of this neighbourhood, and he could get a cab.

These details are nothing to us. How he reached the hotel matters little to us. Before he went there, he had done one thing. He had acted upon his first impulse—he telegraphed to Georgiana to come as fast as a special train could bring her.

Then he went into his own bedroom, locked the door, and fell upon his knees; and in a



speechless address to the Throne of mercy thanked God that his yacht had been delayed. For upon the table lay a telegram to the effect that the yacht had broken her screw—she was a screw steamer, and could not get up.

Had he taken Heloise to Dover, had the yacht met with no accident, they would have been far away on the ocean ; he would not have known of this. Heloise would have been irretrievably ruined. *Now* the nurses, the hotel people, could prove her perfect purity. Louis was dead. *He could marry her.*





## CHAPTER XII.

THEY had finished lunch at Bourne Manor, and had gone out on the lawn, placing their chairs in the shade of the great thicket of rhododendrons and evergreens. Neville threw himself at length upon the sward; Georgiana was languidly looking at the last *Idyls of the King* issued by the Laureate. Horton had received letters by the second post, in which he was deeply interested; they bore the official mark of the United States Government. Pierce was smoking, idly watching the circles of vapour rise in the still August air.

‘This is extraordinary,’ said Horton, who since he had been at Bourne Manor had lost much of his usual reserve, and communicated his affairs comparatively freely. ‘This is very extraordinary; the States are going to repay me the money found on Shebang.’

‘Very honourable of them,’ replied Pierce.

‘I cannot understand it. The money was justly forfeited—it is a large sum, too, and the States are not overflowing with coin. I certainly deserved to lose it. I have never in all my life regretted entering into any speculation but this one; and that was through Louis.’

Now this was partly true, and partly not. The vast possible profit had tempted him; Louis had only quieted his fears. But the best of us are only too ready to cast our faults upon others’ shoulders.

‘I think I see through it,’ said Neville. ‘Depend upon it, it is your position as a capitalist that has influenced them. They know that at any moment they may be in want of a loan; they think that by acting in this manner they will secure your services, and at the same time make a very favourable impression upon the English money market. This quarter of a million will, in that way, aid then to borrow perhaps ten million.’

‘Probably that may be the case,’ said Horton. ‘At all events, here are formal documents informing me that the papers and money found

on Shebang will be paid over to my agents in New York on the 21st of this month; save and except 3000*l.*, which they retain to pay their expenses.'

At that moment Philip Lestrangle came round the thicket of evergreens, and joined them. He was polite to Georgiana and Neville; but ever since their disregard of his advice about the marriage, he had very faintly but distinctly marked them out. He could not be said to avoid them, because he never altered his ordinary course of life in the slightest to escape meeting them. But there was a faint distance in his manner, which said as plainly as words, 'I tolerate you. I even enjoy your company; but I do not approve, and I never will approve, of the deed of which you have been guilty.' He never missed an opportunity of indirectly attacking Georgiana's principles; curiously enough, he never attacked Neville, and the reason was obvious—he considered that Neville had been tempted, drawn into the step he had taken. Neville had not originated it. Now the effect of this constant undercurrent of attack, this slow un-

dermining incessantly followed up, was not inconsiderable upon Georgiana. She had long since begun to doubt her own mission; latterly she had begun to doubt the excellence of the material upon which she had to work. She questioned whether it was possible to improve either sex. In this doubting, irresolute state of mind she naturally paid more attention to Philip's arguments than at a time when she was firm in her own belief, dogmatic in her assertions. She did not assent to his views; she would not admit that he had in a single point worsted her; but in her own secret mind she was more than half convinced. After all, what an overwhelming weight the authority of antiquity carries with it! We may despise it—laugh at it as mere tradition and prejudice; but over the busy spirit of our time there looms and hovers the brooding past, permeating into all our habits; impelling us and filling us with those very hopes, for the fulfilment of which we are straining every nerve—making use of steam and electricity, machinery and science. For a while one of us may soar aloft, upborne on the wings of his own

imagination ; but in time, experience, like the sun, melts away those very wings, deadens the impulse that worked them, for he sees that these thoughts and aspirations are nothing new. They have been before of old time. Men and women have felt thus and hoped thus and striven thus ages and ages ago ; they are striving and aspiring in the same way even now. But the world, that wise old being, has in its weary life found out all the difficulties, the insuperable obstacles that stay its way ; and it has therefore settled down, and instead of attempting to ignore the harness, has accepted it, and works on doggedly and patiently, too wise to exhaust its strength in vain efforts to get free. All this hath been before of old time. The spirit of Ecclesiastes hung heavily over Georgiana and weighed her down. Now Philip, through his holy orders, through the consecration by laying on of hands, was the very representation of this old, old world, of this time that hath been. He brought with him the silent but cogent arguments of the centuries. It was as if he had said, ‘ Do you think that all these hundreds of generations of



men and women, with their throbbing hearts, their restless minds, their iron sinews, would have toiled and moiled, and submitted to the yoke as they have done, had there been any method by which they might have been free? Have all these incalculable millions been idiots, and you only wise? It is the most inordinate vanity, a madness to suppose so. The ages silently mock at you—laugh at you—point their finger in scorn at you. Why persist in such folly?’ And Georgiana was more than half convinced, only the woman in her, the *will* of the woman, would not yet give way. She would not be persuaded. Philip was attacking her now. He avoided the question of the sexes, the direct problem; he attacked her in flank and rear. Take, for instance, the education of children. The kitten and the puppy, the callow fledgling and all those creatures who come to maturity so soon, did not require that their parents should remain united for any length of time. But the human infant, feeble and weak, could not be left alone, especially in civilised countries, till at least sixteen years of age.

‘If,’ said Philip, ‘in our country, for instance, children were let to run at large as the children of savages are, in two generations we should return to barbarism. Forests would grow up where the cultivated fields are now. The steam-engine would be silent—the mines unworked. The bow and arrow would resume their reign, the wild beasts roam over the sites of the cities.’

Excited with his eloquence, Philip was growing heated, and gesticulated as he did in the pulpit, when a footman announced that two ‘persons’—emphasising the word ‘persons’—had called to see Mr. Knoyle. What eloquence could withstand so prosaic an announcement? He stopped; and Horton, begging them to excuse him, walked to the house. He had been gone barely three minutes when the footman returned in great haste and agitation. Mr. Knoyle begged them all to come to him immediately. These ‘persons’ were, in fact, the private agents who had come down to see Horton, and who had arrived just after Francis committed his mad act. They had told him the sad story; they

now repeated it to the rest. Little by little, and by dint of close questioning, Philip and Neville—Horton was too much shocked to inquire curiously—arrived at a rude outline of the event as it really happened. But they could not understand two things: first, why Francis came down to Avonbourne; secondly, why he should attempt to commit suicide there immediately after speaking to a lady.

‘Why,’ said Neville, ‘Lady Knoyle must have been on the platform at the time—she must almost have seen this accident.’

Horton did not reply. A sickening sensation had risen up within him. Out of sight is truly out of mind with most of us; nor was he any exception. Francis had been entirely out of his sight for a whole year. He had forgotten the miserable breach between him and his brother; he remembered it now. Francis had attempted to commit suicide after speaking to a lady. Carlotta was on the platform at the time. A horrible dread, a fear of he knew not what, arose in Horton’s mind. He felt that he must know the worst. He must see Francis. Together with Neville

and Philip and the two agents Horton drove over to the market-town, where Francis was still retained at the office of the constabulary. The man in charge said that his condition was unchanged. He was not violent; that is, he did not attempt to injure any one; but he roamed round the room like a wild beast in its lair, seeking to escape. The superintendent opened the door; they stepped in, closing it behind them. But the wretched maniac, seeing it open, rushed at them to force his way out. Quick as lightning, two men who had been in the room stepped forward and interposed. Horton saw his nephew struggle furiously for a few moments with these men, then relinquish the struggle as useless, and resume his ceaseless walk to and fro in the cell, like a wolf in its den. He took no notice of the visitors.

‘He has been talking of Carlotta somebody,’ said one of the men in a low tone.

Francis caught the name; he repeated it; he stamped; it seemed to fill him with a furious frenzy. He cursed her, he swore and howled with blasphemous rage. They shud-

dered as they listened. Then he seemed to see her in the cell; he fell on his knees and begged and prayed to her as to a god, worshipping, bending his forehead to the ground. Then he sprang up with a yell, and his eyes glared like a cat's in the dark. 'She said I was *mad*,' he cried, 'and I am *mad*—mad, mad, mad! O Carlotta!' and he burst into a passion of tears, and cried and shook and trembled like a child. They could not stand the miserable spectacle any longer. They went out. Horton was pale as death. He laid his hand on his heart—he had a strange pain there. Neville understood him to some extent.

'Even yet,' said he, 'we may be mistaken.' He called to the two railway porters who had assisted to bring Francis to the office, and who still hung about to see the conclusion of the affair. He questioned them. They were ready enough to describe the scene. They described the lady Francis spoke to. Their attention had been called to her by the singular contrast between her rich dress and the wild look and dirty clothes of the man who addressed her. There was not a doubt that it was Carlotta.



Horton whispered to Neville to leave directions, and went out to his carriage; he could stay in that place no longer. The miserable and evil past rose up before him. The ruin that this woman—his wife—had caused rose up in a gigantic spectre before him: A spectre that blotted out the great sun in the sky; a phantom that darkened the August day with its dread wings; that hovered over him like a cloud. A horror, an unutterable loathing, fell upon him. And he had been on the point, nay, he had practically already received her again; he had, as it were, strained her to his breast. The man cowered in his carriage, struck down with the blow—he, the millionaire, the man of countless wealth, cowered in his carriage; and as he did so, the yells of the madman in the cell close by came out, muffled, but distinctly audible, and smote upon his ear.

‘My brother,’ he groaned, ‘my brother!’ For he thought of his brother who had left these two boys to his care. One was a madman, and the other was—where? It was merciful that he never knew. This vampire,



this ghoul, this fearful and incredible creature—he had forgiven her, he had received her. The man's whole being revolted; his gorge rose at it.

Neville, from the door of the office, saw that he was ill, and hastily saying he would write, ran out, sprang into the carriage, and told the coachman to drive on immediately.

‘The oddest part of it all,’ said Philip, who sprang up after him, ‘the most singular thing is that the life of this—this madman was saved by a madman.’

‘I do not think that a man who gallantly imperils his own life to rescue another is mad,’ said Neville sharply, ever ready to cavil at the clergyman, resenting his attacks upon Georgie.

‘I did not say that. God forbid that I should ever utter so disgraceful a sentiment! I said that Francis was saved by a madman; or at least it would appear so. While you were giving directions I spoke to the porters. I asked them about this bald-headed gentleman, for he ought to be—’

‘He ought to be communicated with, and

his courage warmly acknowledged,' said Neville. 'I had forgotten that; of course—'

'Well, I have got his address—it is Major Scone; but he is mad. These porters declare that after he had saved Francis, and come with him all the way to the police-station, he suddenly struck his bald head with his hand, shrieked out some unintelligible gibberish, and set off as hard as he could run back to the station in this burning sun.'

'Afraid of losing his train, perhaps.'

'Wait a bit; he had lost it. That other guard, who has just come up by the station-master's orders to see about Francis, heard the porter telling me this, and he struck in laughing, and told me that the bald-headed man was "ramping" (that was the word he used)—ramping mad, raging up and down the platform, swearing horribly because the station-master would not, as he wished, telegraph and have the express stopped. He declared that he had left a cobra di capello in the carriage under a railway-rug, which he had brought from India. If any one had got into the carriage he must certainly—'

‘I don’t see how that makes him mad.’

‘Well, I don’t say he is. Only it sounds like it; at all events the station-master refused to stop the express, and the old gentleman at once ordered a special train, and produced the money to pay for it in advance; and away he has gone tearing after the cobra; and vociferating that he forgot it in the danger of Francis, and calling himself a murderer.’

‘If it should be a fact,’ said Neville, ‘that he really has left a cobra in the carriage, I can conceive nothing more horrible. Imagine being shut up in a compartment from which there is no escape with such a creature!’

Philip’s object in narrating this story, which he was himself inclined to consider apocryphal, was to interest Horton, who was deadly faint, to try and change the current of his thoughts; but it failed utterly. Horton Knoyle had to be assisted to his room, and the doctor they sent for immediately declared he was in a dangerous state. His heart, long slightly affected, had, as it were, suddenly failed. The greatest care was necessary—he should like more professional assistance. Two

London physicians of the first eminence were at once telegraphed for. A gloom once more fell over Bourne Manor. Pierce retired to his study. None of them but Philip had the heart to tell him the truth.

‘But,’ said Philip, ‘it is my duty. He too was deceived by that woman; it is my duty to tell him all;’ and he did so.

Pierce said nothing. In the bitterness of his heart he turned again to the child whom he had so dearly loved. Forgetting what had happened, he asked for Heloise.

‘My brother,’ cried Philip, utterly overcome, ‘my brother!’

Let us leave them. I fear that neither the offices of the Church nor the deep affection of blood relationship could console this wound. The day wore slowly on, but its troubles were not over yet. Towards six o’clock there came a telegram for Horton Knoyle. The doctor absolutely refused to let him see it. His only chance of life was perfect quiet, complete repose. His mind must not be disturbed. In this emergency they had a consultation, and at last decided that Geor-

giana, as the nearest relation of the invalid, should open it. She did so. She glanced over it, and the colour left her cheek. She held it out to them. Philip took it, and read aloud:

*‘Major Scone to Horton Knoyle, Esq.,  
Bourne Manor, Avonbourne.*

‘Come at once. Lady Knoyle fell from train. Injuries very serious. My train sent for you, at my expense.’

It was dated an hour previously, at a small station about ten miles the Avonbourne side of London. The telegram puzzled them exceedingly. They could not understand how it was that Major Scone, the bald-headed gentleman who had saved Francis’s life, could come to know that Lady Knoyle had met with an accident. They even began to look upon the affair as a possible hoax.

‘I am not of that opinion,’ said Philip. ‘I begin to believe that it is only too true. Look at this: Knoyle is up-stairs, and in a critical state; Francis is a maniac. Depend upon it this family has incurred the wrath of

Heaven. We are punished as *Œdipus* was—a fatal fate pursues us.'

'Then you think that there really has been an accident?'

'I shall certainly go and see,' said Philip. 'Say nothing to *Pierce*,' he added; 'he has enough grief, let him be.'

Neville and Philip then left for the station. *Georgiana* remained to attend to her brother. At the station (fatal confirmation) they found the special train—an engine and two carriages—awaiting them. They got in, and were whirled up to the small third-rate station near *London Scone* had telegraphed from. He met them on the platform.

'I am a murderer!' he said. These were his first words. He led them to a small room used by the station-master. The blinds were drawn; a small knot of men were gathered outside whispering. They entered. Coats, rugs, pieces of carpet were spread upon the floor in one corner, and on them a woman richly dressed was lying, her back propped up against the wall, her head supported in a woman's hands. It was *Carlotta*. Her lovely



features were white, deadly white—her arms lay by her side, utterly useless. There was no apparent motion of the breast, no breathing.

‘Is she—’ they asked in a low voice, hesitating to form the dread question.

‘No,’ said the surgeon who had been called; ‘she is not dead. There is a faint, a very faint breathing; a mirror is stained by her breath; there is a perceptible motion of the heart. But I am afraid to move her, else you would not see her lying there. My house is scarcely a quarter of a mile distant. But I dare not move her. While she lies still she lives; a jar, a shake, and the feeble spark may be extinguished.’

‘Where are the injuries?’ said Philip.

Neville was too shocked to speak. It was but a few hours before that he had seen this woman in the full glory of her beauty, swelling with the vigour of her life, prouder than the peacock in his wondrous colours. Now she was lying helpless, unconscious, on the edge of the Dark Valley. Notwithstanding the memory of the miserable maniac, notwithstanding the reflection of her incalcu-

lable guilt, he could not, seeing her condition, help pitying her. They had cut open her dress, her lovely neck was partly visible. He could not take his eyes from those exquisite curves, from that marble whiteness. The surgeon said he had as yet formed no opinion as to the extent, or even the true position, of her injuries. There were no bones broken; and so far as he had been able to ascertain there were few bruises. Her dress had saved her. The injuries must be internal, and he greatly feared it was the brain. He could not examine her head till he could remove her hair. He was waiting for authority to remove her to his house. His assistant, under the direction of Major Scone, had constructed a species of litter to convey her to his house; but knowing the extreme danger of the attempt, he had hesitated, and waited till some relatives of the patient arrived to authorise him. It was the only chance of her life. The cobra had bit her in the foot; but he apprehended little or no danger from that, as the teeth had had to pass through the stocking, which in all probability had intercepted most

of the venom. Philip and Neville at once assured him that they were willing to take the responsibility, and they assisted to carry her. Scone, bringing his Indian experience to bear, had constructed a litter with a few poles and blankets, by the aid of which they carried her safely to the surgeon's house. Here he shaved away the glorious hair—Carlotta's pride—and examined the skull. As he expected, there was the wound. The pressure of the bone upon the brain was the cause of this lengthened insensibility. He dared not perform the operation alone; he did not feel certain that she could bear it.

They telegraphed to London, and in two hours a great surgeon arrived. He pronounced the operation safe. He relied upon the intense physical vigour of the patient—a vigour obvious at first sight, and confirmed on examination. Two hours afterwards Carlotta became sensible, spoke a few words about a snake, and then fell asleep. Philip and Neville, after hearing this intelligence, left the house, as they would have done had it contained the plague. While the life was trem-

bling in the balance Carlotta was lost sight of; she was a human being ; the identity was not present to their minds. Now that the danger of immediate death was over, the memory of her character and her crimes returned to them; their disgust drove them from the place. It was too late now to return to Bourne Manor. They accepted the hospitality of the station-master, humble as it was, and resolved to remain till the morning. Now it was on that very night that Noel telegraphed to Georgiana to come at once by special train to Heloise. The telegram sent at ten o'clock did not reach Georgiana till nearly midnight, as she had just lain down to rest after watching Horton. She knew not what to do. Her whole heart went out to Heloise; she had never ceased to love her. Noel, in his passion and excitement, mistook the disgust that was shown against him to extend to Heloise also. Georgiana was driven wild for a few moments by conflicting anxieties. She dared not leave Horton; she trembled with eagerness to see Heloise, whose whereabouts she now knew for the first time.

By the morning, perhaps, Noel would remove her, would change his mind, and Heloise might be lost for ever. It was useless going to Pierce; the old man was utterly exhausted. Philip and Neville were gone. At last she determined to telegraph to them to go on to London, or to come back and relieve her. She wrote a telegram and gave it to a groom. Sleepy and tired, the man ventured to say that it was too late; no telegram could be sent after ten o'clock.

‘O, give the man a sovereign!’ cried Georgiana; ‘make haste, do! Here, give him three, five, if you like!’

The groom galloped off with the message. At the platform he found one solitary watcher. The watchman declared that the office was closed. The groom offered the reward.

‘All right,’ said the watchman; ‘give me the money, I’ll manage it.’

The groom gave him the money and the message, and departed. As soon as he was gone, the watchman quietly pocketed the five sovereigns, and thrust the message under the locked door of the telegraph office.

So Noel waited all that night in vain. Next morning, still saying nothing to Heloise, he removed his own luggage to another hotel adjoining, and telegraphed again. But before he received an answer, Philip and Neville, who had now received Georgiana's telegram, reached the hotel where Heloise was stopping, and met Noel carrying his dressing-bag. Noel bowed; Philip drew himself up stiffly; Neville did not extend his hand.







## CHAPTER XIII.

THEN there ensued perhaps the strangest court of inquiry that had ever been held. In a small sitting-room of the hotel Noel confronted them. He was at once the prisoner and the prisoner's solicitor. He called his witnesses. His case was that Heloise was as pure and as innocent as when she had left Bourne Manor.

‘Will you swear to this?’ asked Philip.

Philip and Neville were the magistrates. Philip was the chairman.

‘I will,’ said Noel firmly; ‘before God I avow that I return her as she came to me.’

Philip took a small Testament from his pocket. ‘Swear it upon this,’ he said.

Noel swore. Then he called the hotel people; first the waiter who had rushed to help him extinguish the fire which had seized on Heloise's dress. Meantime he had sent for the doctor and the two nurses. These arrived,

proved positively that Heloise had never been alone with Noel. She had occupied her own rooms the whole of the time. She had had female companions up to that very hour.

‘And is it true that Louis is dead?’

Noel took them with him to see the corpse. They, the judges, went with the prisoner and viewed it. They left the awful presence of death convinced. Philip laid his hand on Noel’s shoulder.

‘We believe you,’ he said; ‘but, mark me, this was none of your doing. God forbid that I should judge you; but I see the hand of Heaven in all this guarding my brother’s child. Had not she dropped that handkerchief, had your yacht not met with an accident, had not you narrowly escaped drowning, and so gone to see the bargeman, I shudder to think what might have happened. Sir, I tell you straight *your* guilt is as great. There is my hand. I do not judge you.’

Noel took it; his bronzed face flushed up to his brow. There was a time when the wrathful spirit of the man would have thrown all these words back into his teeth. But he

loved Heloise. In his very soul he humbled himself, rejoicing that she had been saved. They went up now to see her.

‘She must return with us to Bourne Manor,’ said Philip.

They entered the apartment. Heloise started, flushed, turned pale, ran to Noel and seized his arm, then thrust him away with a gesture, as much to say, ‘You have betrayed me, you have brought this open disgrace on me.’ But she could not speak.

‘We have come to take you home,’ said Philip, advancing and speaking in a kindly tone. He felt that she had been more sinned against than sinning.

Heloise receded, and grasped Noel’s arm again.

‘I will not leave him!’ she cried, the hot flush mounting to her forehead.

‘I have not told her,’ said Noel in a low voice, ‘I *dared* not. Do you, Neville, or you, Philip—Louis I mean.’

‘Heloise,’ said Philip, ‘your husband is dead; Louis, Lord Fontenoy, is no more.’

‘What!’ cried Heloise; ‘I will not believe

it; this is some plan to deceive me, some subterfuge. Noel, help me, protect me! O, do *you* desert me?

For Noel hung back and did not rush to her assistance. The words, the tone pierced him to the heart. 'My darling,' he said.

'Hush,' interrupted Philip, 'do not insult the dead. Yes, Heloise, Louis is dead; he was drowned; I have seen his body; it is indeed true.'

'Then—then—' began Heloise, bewildered.

'We can marry,' whispered Noel, so low that the others did not catch the sense of his words, though they heard the sound of his whisper.

Heloise then turned red as scarlet, then pale again. 'I cannot go home,' she said more gently; 'anywhere else—not there, Carlotta is there;' and anger flashed in her eye, a frown darkened on her forehead.

'Carlotta is not there,' said Philip; 'she is lying crushed and helpless at —— Station. She fell from the train.'

'I will not—I cannot believe it,' said Heloise; 'it is all part of a plan to deceive

me, to disgrace and humble me. I will not go. Noel, Noel, help me!’

‘Dearest, it is true,’ replied Noel. He could not refrain from the term of endearment. His hand sought hers; he held it in defiance of Philip’s gesture; he pressed it to reassure her. ‘It is true.’

‘And,’ said Philip, ‘Pierce and Horton are disabused; they have seen her guilt too plain at last. She will never return to insult you. Come, Heloise, this is no place for you; Pierce is longing for you. We have all forgotten, all is forgiven. Come.’

‘I will not,’ said Heloise. ‘I will not leave you,’ turning to Noel. ‘I care not what has happened; why did we not go on board last night? O Noel, Noel, why did you let these people come?’

‘Because I love you, dearest; believe me it is best.’

‘Will you come with me?’

‘I cannot to Bourne Manor; I will as near as I dare; I will go to Knoylelands—that is if Georgiana will permit.’

‘Georgiana will permit,’ said a voice; and

turning they saw her enter. She had received Noel's second telegram, and Horton, being better, had come up by the early express.

While Philip and Neville held their court of inquiry steam had brought her to the scene. Heloise rushed to her, fell into her arms, sobbed and cried. By one consent the men left the room. An hour afterwards Heloise left the hotel with Georgiana. Shortly afterwards the gentlemen in another cab followed them.

The journey to Avonbourne was not a pleasant one; but it came to an end at last. Noel went on to Knoylelands; Philip, Neville, Georgiana, and Heloise returned to Bourne Manor. Pierce received her as one from the tomb. He would not let her go out of his sight an instant. He clung to her, she clung to him. For days these two sat together, silent, hand in hand; for days the rest carefully abstained from intruding on them. Pierce remembered his momentary infatuation with Carlotta; he hated himself, he strove to make amends to the child he loved, whose heart had ever been innocent, though she had taken a



miserable step. He heard from her own lips the cause, the fatal intelligence, that had made her take that step. He did not wonder at it; it was the first time he had heard of this. Horton had not told him; how could the husband communicate his disgrace? The rest did not wish to add another sorrow to his cares. The old man rose in his wrath and paced the room.

‘It is well that he is dead,’ he cried, ‘or, aged as I am—’

The feeble hand clenched, a light shone in the eyes that years had not dimmed. In his joy over Heloise, in his detestation of Louis, the revulsion of feeling against Carlotta, he forgave Noel, he forgot his conduct. He sent for him to Bourne Manor.

Noel came reluctantly. It was as much as all his strength of mind, all his hardihood could face. He did it from love of Heloise. He rode through the gates from which he had been thrust—despised, jeered at, condemned, wounded, covered with infamy—into the dusty road. The door was opened for him by one of those very servants who had stood on

the wall and mocked him. It was bitter as wormwood, as gall in his mouth. He felt that he was punished; but for Heloise's sake. He strengthened himself with the thought that she was saved. He had not been guilty of her ruin. He had escaped that. What cared he for the rest? Pierce met him frankly. He took his hand; he made no allusion to the past; he had seen into his daughter's heart. This was about three weeks after Heloise's return. Heloise, little by little, had told him all—her love for Noel, her deep unutterable affection. The old man's heart warmed towards the man whom his daughter loved. He remembered the days when he and Noel had tramped the stubble a year ago. He met him with a smile.

‘There is a gun for you,’ he said; ‘it is the 1st to-morrow. You must stay; we will beat Cranberry Moor; the birds are strong there this year.’

Noel looked at him in amaze. He had expected a cold reception; at the most a mere acknowledgment of his presence; possibly revilings and taunts. For a moment he could

not understand it; he could not conceive the kindly interest. Then he sat down and burst into tears. The strong man wept; the weak and feeble old man soothed him.

‘Hush!’ said Pierce; ‘I know all. She is worthy of deep love, of extreme passion. I forgive.’

‘Then you did not mean to repulse me that—that day?’ said Noel at last.

‘I did not—I did not! Forgive me; I was wild; I cried for Heloise—you did not answer. I—but we were all deceived that day. I tremble when I think of the misery that so nearly resulted from our injustice. But hush! say no more. It is over; let it be buried in oblivion. You must stay. Jones shall go over for your traps. There is a gun for you. Horton will accompany us. We two must ride,’ he said with a smile—‘we old fogies. You are young, and can walk.’

For Horton had risen from his chamber, and was allowed gentle exercise. He had expressed a wish to see the sport. All this was barbarous, you say. Louis only dead barely a month; Carlotta still weak and ill.

But remember what Louis had been : could they be expected to linger over his memory ? That evening they did discuss his singular death. No inquiries had elicited any information upon it. He had been found by the bargeman : that was the beginning of the evidence—that was the end of it. There was not a tittle of evidence to show how he came into the water. One thing was certain : if he was thrown in, it was not for the purpose of robbery ; for his watch and purse, even his gold toothpick, were untouched. Not a thing had been taken. There were no marks of violence. Undoubtedly death had resulted from drowning alone. They talked it over calmly, without a show of regret, or even of particular interest. How could they feel any ?

This was in the smoking-room ; for there was a room set apart for that purpose at Bourne Manor. Neville and Pierce were of opinion that he had accidentally fallen in. Philip suggested that he might have committed suicide. (Philip, though a clergyman, and one with a very high opinion of his sacred

character, was nevertheless very fond of his cigar; with him it was the one touch of nature that made him kin with the world.) Noel had no theory. To tell truth, he did not trouble to think of it; he had seen many dead men in his time; thousands of men had died the cause of whose death was unknown.

Horton at last said very slowly and rather gloomily that he believed he could suggest a cause. Louis, he said, belonged to several secret societies, both foreign and English. Particularly he belonged to the —, well known as a most dangerous and unscrupulous sect of men—the more dangerous because they had no definite course of action. No one knew which way they would turn next. He had reason to believe that Louis had turned traitor to one of these societies, and revealed their secrets. (He referred to the capture of Shebang; he thought that that was Louis's doing, though he had no intention of revealing his suspicions.) Now these secret societies thought very little of human life; a man more or less was of no account in their ideas.

‘But surely,’ said Noel, ‘such an assassina-

tion could not take place in England; the police—'

'I do not know,' said Horton thoughtfully. 'This I do know: every year certain statistics are published; and from these you may gather that a large number of murders *are* committed in the course of a year, and the murderers are never discovered, and the motive of many of them seems utterly inexplicable.'

'All murders are found out,' said Philip dogmatically, 'sooner or later; a murderer never yet descended to the grave unpunished. You smile, sir.'

Noel could not repress a smile.

'Well,' he said, 'in San Francisco a dead man is as common as a dead dog. These men are never punished, at least not once in ten times.'

Philip rather avoided this aspect of the question. He changed the subject, and expressed his detestation of secret societies. For his part, though a thorough Protestant and an opponent of Ritualism, still he thought that the Church of Rome was right upon this one



point, in refusing to admit even Freemasons to the communion.

Pierce—a Freemason himself—warmly opposed this remark. Noel did not join in the conversation. His thoughts were with Heloise. He had not seen her yet ; she did not appear at the dinner-table that evening. He did not see her that night, nor in the morning. As he paced the stubble, and fired at the brown coveys, his heart was full of her. His aim was not so steady as it had been the previous September. Pierce shot better. This pleased the old man : he had beaten the young one. ‘An old man can do somewhat still,’ he laughed ; and pleased with himself, communicated his geniality to the others. Noel saw Heloise that evening ; she came in to dinner. He had longed for and yet dreaded this interview. When it came it passed over easy as an ordinary meeting. She took his hand calmly. Perhaps the eyes drooped a little, the mouth quivered, the voice trembled. What of that ? In that large room, with the bustle of sitting down to dine, who noticed it save he ? Noel saw it, and his heart leapt. Her love was his,

then, the same as ever. He answered her with one quick fiery glance. She turned away, unable to sustain that look. She sat by Georgiana. He had no opportunity to exchange anything but the most common of common-places with her that evening. Nor the next, nor the next; though he still stayed on at Bourne Manor. She was always with Georgie.

Time passed, months slipped away. The winter was at hand. Then there grew up a tacit understanding. Noel was the accepted suitor. He had left Bourne Manor, of course. He was living at Knoylelands with Neville and Georgie. He came over daily, yet he never saw her alone. She seemed to shrink from it; yet it was plain that her heart was ever with him. Philip asked them to stay out the year from Louis's death. Pierce pleaded for six months. Noel was resolute for six months. How could she be supposed to mourn? The whole county—at least those who knew anything at all—knew the circumstances; it was sheer folly sacrificing happiness to an imaginary code. So Philip had to give way, and the marriage was fixed for the

second week in January. Noel stayed at Bourne Manor the whole time, with Neville and Georgie.

Georgie had her wish at last. The plan she had laid out in her own mind so long ago had come to pass now; at least partially. She had the circumstances, but not in all things the spirit. The letter of her wish was fulfilled, but not the spirit. Neville's study was complete. She could go up there, and find him at work in it. She had the quiet and the rest of the country house. Heloise was within easy reach. They saw each other almost daily; either one drove over to Knoylelands, or the other rode to Bourne Manor. It was the business, as it were, of their lives; yet Georgiana was not contented. The ferment of that leaven with which her mind had been tinged was not over yet. It worked and worked, and made her restless, brooding over the great problem. Slowly, very slowly, but surely, her heart came round to the great temple of woman—the Hearth. In the end the Hearth conquered the rest. She saw, or thought she saw—Georgiana must find a

reason for everything she did—that after all the true sphere of woman was her home. These enormous problems could not be solved by one person, nor in one lifetime, nor in the lifetime of a generation. They required centuries to smooth away the angles, to prepare the grooves before the new machinery could fit and run easily. The framework of society must not be blown up from beneath—scattered in all directions. We must place scaffolding around it ; we must buttress up its falling towers ; clamp and bar its pinnacles ; labour at it year after year, season after season, as the builders of our great cathedrals did. It could not be done in a day. Such hasty attempts only made matters worse. She had overshot the mark. The world had been wiser than her. The true temple for woman was the Hearth. To the hearth she had come ; but had she a *right* to sit there ; was she really and truly in the sight of Heaven Neville's wife ? She had restless thoughts on this point. Had she been singled out to overstep the boundaries prescribed by usage and time, honoured and accepted by so many myriads ? Had she a

divine mission to lead the van in this violent way? Since she had doubted her mission, and doubted the materials upon which she had tried to work, she had begun to think that she was guilty. She had no right to sit there; no right to enter the temple. She had thrust her way in unconsecrated. Still there lingered in her mind the old vanity and conceit; there was a natural hesitation to own herself in the wrong. After a while she consoled herself in this way: they had tried this marriage contract for a year and a half. They were satisfied with each other; they did not wish for change. They could now, with every show of consistency with their original declared principles, enter into a more lasting contract. But how to break these things to Neville? There was but one way—to force herself to do it. One evening she came into his study. It was near Christmas, and the fire was burning briskly, as it does in time of frost. The pendent lamp lit up the lofty chamber. Neville was reading—as he always liked to read—in his dressing-gown. His face welcomed her. She fell on her knees, and looked up at his



face. Frankly she told him, while her face flushed scarlet, that she wished him to marry her. Contrary to her dread, Neville did not taunt her with the change in her feelings. He raised her up tenderly, and kissed her. He told her that he was only too glad. He had yielded to her urgent wish—he had even tried to carry it out to the very fulness of completion when once he had yielded. He had carefully concealed from her his real feelings; but now that she had come to him, he was only too willing. So it was after a time arranged that they should be married, or re-married, on the same day with Heloise and Noel. And they were. Philip officiated at the double marriage. It took place in the old grey church at Avonbourne. It was a quiet affair; there was no show of any kind. Beyond the ringing of the bells there was no sign of anything extraordinary going forward. After the ceremony, Georgiana and Neville returned to Knoylelands. Noel and Heloise went to Paris.

Horton had long ere this recovered his health; but his old strength and vigour were gone. He retired from business, and realised



his wealth. The very name of Knoyle disappeared from the places of shares and loans. He purchased a large tract of land at no great distance from Avonbourne, but nearer to the sea. He took up his residence in a mansion upon this property within easy reach of Bourne Manor, and he rarely passed a week without calling on Pierce. He occupies his time with building a magnificent palace—such a structure as shall eclipse all the mansions of England, and be a worthy memorial of his wealth. He has chosen for the architect of this palace Claudius Lovel, who lives in the same house with him, to be near his employer. His heart warms towards the student. Claudius little suspects that he is building a palace for himself; that he will be the chief heir to Horton's wealth, on condition of his marriage with Ella. Ella is at Knoylelands, still painting. Her love of horses makes her a great favourite with Pierce. He is ever buying her some new and expensive animal to sketch and draw from, ever sending for her to visit some famous stud with him.

And Francis? Francis is well cared

for. He is becoming less violent every month. The physicians hold out hopes of his ultimate recovery. They indulge him in his favourite amusement—turning and joining. He has made some handsome furniture. If he recovers, he will be well off; for his brother's money comes to him in addition to his own. For it has now become known to them that Victor is dead, though they never learned whose hand fired the shot. But Horton will never go to see him. He spares no money on his behalf; but he cannot face the sight of him, it recalls too many miserable memories.

Carlotta did not die. As the surgeon had foretold, the poison of the cobra scarcely affected her at all. The stocking cleaned the teeth and absorbed the poison. She completely recovered from the effects of the fall upon her head. Her intense physical vigour—the immenseness, so to say, of her organisation—carried her through what would have killed hundreds. She is at Torquay. Every luxury that gold can furnish is hers. She is cared for almost to the extreme of over-watchfulness. She cannot express a wish that is

not immediately gratified. But she is not happy ; she cannot revel as of yore in the consciousness of her own surpassing beauty. It is true that there is no scar, no disfiguring wound ; but her face has lost its colour, her skin its dazzling whiteness, her arms their lovely polish. This worries her—maddens her. She spends money lavishly on all kinds of cosmetics ; it is in vain. That deadly paleness will not depart, neither will her hair grow in the old luxuriousness. She feels that she has aged. The last year has done more to age her than all the preceding forty. Yet she will not give up hope. The physicians candidly tell her that her only chance of ever recovering her colour, her polish, and her wealth of hair is a return of the old superabundant health and vigour. That was the cause of it when it existed ; to that she must look for the restoration of her beauty.

Therefore she has gone to Torquay, to escape the bitter cold ; for her constitution is better suited to a tropical climate, and she is too weak for a bracing air. She drives up

and down; she sees people turn and look at her; even this slight tribute of—not respect, certainly, nor admiration, but of distinction—pleases her. Remorse? Not one whit. Her indomitable nature supports her still. She has been faithful to the logic of her type; she has consistently followed the law of her own existence; she regrets nothing, she hopes for nothing but the restoration of her strength, and with it her fatal beauty. But this waiting, this long tedious waiting, drives her half frantic. Her mind resembles the dark and stormy winter sea—tossing, restless, gloomy, yet full of fierce and untamable vigour:

‘ Ocean old, centuries old,  
Strong as youth, and as uncontroll’d.’

There is something grand and statuelike in the very consistency, the firmness of this creature. Her living pose was as unalterable as the firmness of those marble groups which all the world admires, but which no one wishes to imitate.



## CHAPTER XIV.

THE spring has passed away, the summer, and the autumn is at hand. The corn is down; the yellow stubble and the ripening apples of the orchard, gold and red and crimson among the fading leaves, indicate that the year has reached its utmost height, its fullest development; henceforth it must decline.

Noel has taken a house in the New Forest. It is built on the side of a hill; and from the uppermost story he can see the distant sea. Of late, Noel has begun to spend much of his time in this uppermost story, or walking to and fro on the ridge of the hill, where he has but to turn his head and the white foam-flecks dance before his eyes. Over the landscape around him there is a yellow haze; the woodlands are asleep, and the heavens have drawn a gauzy curtain over them. The leaves are

brilliant in colour—yellow and gold and crimson, on a background of green. The beeches are marked with great spots of ruddy gold. A faint breath of air steals over the land at times, and there is a rustling sound—it is the ghosts of the leaves descending. But the softness and the haze, the warmth and the slumberous beauty do not soothe Noel; he walks to and fro, to and fro on the ridge of the hill where he can see the sea.

Heloise, down in the house there, is very happy. All days are alike to her; do you know why? She carries the year and all its seasons in her arms. The whole globe swings slowly from side to side in yonder cradle—*her* globe. For the sad and wretched memories of the past have faded into utter and complete oblivion. Her whole life is here; it is *her* child, little Noel. In him she has forgotten all; in his birth she entered upon a new life; with him she was born again. There are no vain regrets, no vague longings, no unsatisfied desires with her. A light beams in her eyes; her step is proud and elastic; her voice rings as it never rang before. She



is very beautiful. Noel, looking at her thoughtfully, thinks that she is even more beautiful than when he first knew her. She is lighted up from within with a divine glory. Yet he turns away and seeks his solitary terrace on the hill—to and fro, in sight of the sea. He has picked his apple; he has reached it at last. It hung high and lovely on the topmost branch of the moss-grown trunk—higher than the mistletoe-bough—far up, next the sky. The dead branches gave way beneath his feet, and bruised and injured him. His heart failed; once again, yet once more. At last he has it, all colour and odour. It is no Dead-Sea apple, no painted hollow thing. It is real, solid, ripe, sweet to the taste, pleasant to the palate, good and wholesome with all its beauty. There are no ashes inside it. To the very pips, the brown ripe pips, it is sweet, delicious. He has seized upon his beam of sunlight.

Deep in some forest we have all of us found some shady nook, where the boles of the trees were grown over thick with lichens and moss; where the boughs hung near us,

and the silence of the primeval wood was around us. Aslant through an opening in the branches, far away in the depths of the bracken, there fell one long beam of sunlight ; behind it all was shadow, mystic, beautiful. But we could go no farther. We could only rest here in the cool arbour but a few minutes. Time was short ; money, labour, called us away on to the dusty high-road. All our lives we remembered the deep wood and the beam of sunlight aslant far in among the bracken. If we could but have thrown aside our cares and troubles, flung off for ever the toil for money, forgotten the dusty road, and, plunging into the shadow, followed that beam of light into the mystic forest, ever among the ferns and the mosses, listening to the sound among the tree-tops, gathering the wild berries, dreaming the day away !

Noel had grasped his sunlight. He had stepped into the shadowy mystic wood ; no need to labour and toil, no cares of money no necessity to follow the beaten dusty track, had held him back. He had followed it, laid hands on it. It did not slip from his grasp,

a mere sham. He held it; it was tangible—more lovely now than in the distance. This beam of sunlight was down there in the house beside the hill; yet he strode to and fro alone on the terrace, and his glances were away far over the boundless sea.

They tell us that *ennui* dwells in gilded halls, on sofas, in the boxes at the theatre, on the deck of the yacht, in the saloons where rank and fashion, even royalty, lingers. It may be so; but the deepest, the worst of all *ennui* dwells not there, but with the earnest man. After the toil of long years—after the self-denial, the slow process of building up the fortune—there comes a time when, in the eye of the mind, the whole scaffolding fades away. The office, the desk, the ledgers, and the books, the distant throb-throb of the engine,—all feels like a vision, and the man comes back to himself. His hair is growing grey and thinner. There are lines upon his brow; the hands are white and nervous; they have lost the brave vigour of youth. The dreams, the hopes of that youth are here, all around—wealth, honour, wife, children, success; and what is

it? All artificial. While he has been building the ship, the heart that was to sail in her has withered up and passed away. The hollow winds of the late autumn howl around the corners; the heavy rain beats against the window; there is a dull depression in the atmosphere. The pen falls from the finger; the letter is unwritten; the head leans upon the hands. *This is ennui.* What shall we do with ourselves? This is the cry of our age. We have exhausted all passions and all pleasures. We have left these, and believed for a while that in earnest work was the true life of man. We have yawned over this too, and found that we were grinding the wind. For what are our works? The fire comes and sweeps them away; years follow years, and they sink out of sight. There is nothing that we can do that is really something *after it is done*. We can no longer deceive ourselves into feeling that it is in the *doing*, not the afterwards, that all lies. We have been *doing*, you see, so long—so many thousands of years!

Come here to this garden-path. Bend

down, and look closely. Here is a tiny streak, a line, a mark running across it. Watch, and an ant comes along it—another and another. This is a highway in the ant-world, a great thoroughfare, the track of a whole nation. Look for it after a rain: where is it then? Our cities and our castles, our canals, our roads, our piers into the sea: what are all these compared with the vastness of the world, still more with the vastness of the universe, but mere scratches on the surface, as little, as despicable as this track of the ants across the garden-path? If only, you see—if only we could be like the ants, who see no farther—who look not beyond their track—whose minds from birth to death never conceive a thought beyond their work—who never imagine the vastness around them—then we too might say, ‘See what great things we have done!’ But we have souls; and the soul cannot be satisfied with the city, that is but a grain of sand upon the desert; the pier, that is but a grain of sand upon the shore. The soul sees the littleness of it all. Our minds look into our souls as upon the surface



of some divine mirror, and there see reflected the despicable littleness of it all. Even this littleness lasts but for a little time. ‘The thought of death casts upon life a lurid glow, like that of a conflagration lighting up what it is about to devour.’ So said an evil man, but a deep student of human nature. This lurid glow lights up some of our lives. It lit up Carlotta’s. There was a burning lurid light over her whole nature, over her whole existence. Strong shadows compassed her about—darkness, and flames, and vast clouds of smoke. There hangs over her now a gloom like the gloom of Hades; for she is still beside the restless ocean.

We are all tired of our lives; we have done everything, felt everything, tried everything. What shall we do with ourselves?

Neville is building what he calls the Temple of Nature. Thick fir-trees encompass it on three sides—the north, the west, and partly the bitter east. But those lines of fir-trees are open towards the south, so that the sun and the soft southern winds may waft warmth over it. There he has reared up columns of



white marble, roofed with marble too, like unto a Grecian temple. The front is towards the south; there the steps go down to the green lawn. There are no statues, no gods, no altar. The columns are open, and the wind wanders through them. The swallows build under the eaves. There are no carvings, no processions of men and women and horses trooping along the frieze. But the columns are crowned with Corinthian capitals—the acanthus; the frieze is carved with leaves and boughs. There is a room: no ascetic *cell*, but fitted up warmly for the winter-time, even with a stove, and a window, and a closed door, and carpet. Here in the summer you can sit at the door of the room, and gaze down the long aisle of columns out upon the rolling downs stretching away to the far south; and between a cleft of the hills, far away at the horizon, there stretches a dim line, and that line is the sea. For Neville too has built his temple where he can see the sea. When the leaves rustle, and the fir-trees moan in the autumn wind, and the rain dashes against the white columns, he sits in

the temple-cell warm and comfortable at the window, and hearkens to the 'sound of the going in the tops of the trees,' and watches the mists drive across from hill to hill, and ever and anon catches a glimpse of the distant dark line—the line where the sea and the sky meet. This is his Temple of Nature. Will Nature always fill his heart? Will the sun, the sea, the sky, the woods content him? He hears a song as he sits here: the trees lift up their voices, the hills chant, the sun swells the song; and that song you may find, all wondrous as it is, in the most commonplace of all books, the Book of Common Prayer, *Benedicite, omnia opera*: 'O ye heavens, O ye waters, O ye sun and moon, O ye stars of heaven, O ye showers and dew, O ye winds, O ye fire and heat, O ye dews and frosts, O ye nights and days, green things, mountains, earth, praise Him and magnify Him for ever!'

These two alone, Neville and Heloise, each in their separate places, in their separate way, have found peace—Heloise in her child, Neville in his Nature, which is, in plain words,

only another word for the Book in which he reads of God. To Heloise, her child is this book; his cradle is her temple. She does not notice Noel's ways; he is ever so loving, so kind; his heart is ever with her, but his soul? The man, you see, has travelled far and wide. What can we do that does not bring its own reaction on us? It is long ago; but the jungle and the forest, the desert and the ocean,—these have been his home. He has his apple, he has his beam of sunlight; yet he paces to and fro on the ridge of the hill, and his glance is afar to the sea. O restless, restless ocean! O restless human heart!

‘It little profits that an idle king  
By this still hearth. . . .  
I cannot rest from travel; I will drink  
Life to the lees; all times I have enjoy’d  
Greatly, have suffer’d greatly, both with those  
That loved me and alone; on shore, and when,  
Through scudding drifts, the rainy Hyades  
Vext the dim sea.

Come, my friends,  
’Tis not too late to seek a newer world;  
Push off, and, sitting well in order, smite  
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds  
To sail beyond the sunset and the baths  
Of all the western stars until I die.’

Heloise has read this to him; for to her he is Ulysses, and she looks on him as heroic; but he walks to and fro on the terrace, and smiles faintly; for he thinks that the moderns have sailed beyond the sunset, even beyond the Happy Isles. And where—where is there an ocean into which *he* could sail to the unknown—to that which will satisfy him? Then he turns and smiles on her, and she beckons from the terrace to her boy at the window far below.

THE END.

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